

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 4 July 2010

No. T0632

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Imitating a Personal God: Imitating a God who rejoices

What comes into your mind when you're told God is a God who rejoices? Well, I'll tell you at the end of my talk what I immediately thought about when I saw, from the schedule of the *Truth for Today* programmes, that I was to give this talk.

But, first of all, let me major in on what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said on the subject of God rejoicing for it answers some very important questions as to when and why God rejoices. When tax collectors and sinners were attracted to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled: "This man receives sinners and eats with them". He responded by telling them the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. It's found in Luke 15 and each was valuable to the one who had suffered loss. Jesus said that the shepherd who had lost one out of a hundred sheep, the woman who had lost one out of ten coins, and the father who had lost his younger son, all rejoiced when each was found. What's this got to do with God rejoicing someone might ask? The answer is found in the comment repeated by the Lord Jesus after the invitations made by the shepherd and the woman to their friends and neighbours: 'Rejoice with me, for I have found...that [which] was lost', verses 6 and 9. Again, after each He said: "Just so, I tell you, there is rejoicing in heaven and before the angels of God over one sinner who repents", verses 7 and 10. Then in verses 23-24, the father commands: "Bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to [rejoice]".

When and why does God rejoice? He rejoices when a person repents of his sins and turns to find salvation in Christ. Paul calls this the Gospel of the grace of God, which consists of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, see Acts 20:21 and 24. In Luke 15, Jesus explains that the whole Godhead rejoices when someone is converted. How different to the situation in Noah's time when God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually! He was sorry that He had made man and it grieved His heart, see Genesis 6:5-6. He judged man in the Flood. However, in the Gospel era He is seeking the lost. We know this because the Lord Jesus said: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost", Luke 19:10. Jesus, as it were, expanded upon this statement in Luke 15 and showed that:

- The shepherd pictures God the Son who seeks the lost.
- The woman pictures God the Holy Spirit seeking the lost.
- The father pictures God the Father seeking the lost.

In each part of the parable, each Person of the Godhead rejoices: "was lost but is now found!" (verses 6, 9, 24 and 32) But there's a progression to the work of salvation in the parable, which we'll trace through.

The good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep

We know from the Lord's own words that He is the Shepherd for He said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep", John 10:11. He laid down His life on the cross at Calvary. In Luke 15:4, the shepherd is said to pursue the lost sheep until he finds it. Elizabeth Frye (Clephane) captures the reality of what the journey meant for the good Shepherd:

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found the sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick, and helpless, and ready to die.*

*Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way
That mark out the mountain track?
They were shed for the one who had gone astray,
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.
Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?
They are pierced tonight by many a thorn.*

Each one of us needs to be saved for Isaiah 53:6 says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all". Today you can experience salvation by believing that the Saviour died and rose again. If you repent of your sins, He'll rejoice as Isaiah goes on to say: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied", (verse 11 (King James (Authorised) Version)). Notice in Luke 15:5 that the found sheep is placed on the Shepherd's shoulders (plural). Isaiah 9:6 says He's able to bear the government of the whole world upon His shoulder (singular): "I give [My sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one", John 10:28-30.

The diligent woman seeking the lost coin

The woman of the parable shows us the present activity of God the Holy Spirit in convicting men of sin and of bringing them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The silver coin was a drachma, worth about a day's wages. Houses in those days had earthen floors and there was very little daylight within. So the sweeping and the finding would require much effort. The lamp in the parable represents the word of God, which brings to light the seriousness of sin and points to Christ as the Saviour. The Holy Spirit uses the word of God to effect His work within each of us. We have "been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever...And this is the word which by the Gospel was preached unto you", 1 Peter 1:23 and 25 (King James (Authorised) Version). The Holy Spirit also enlightens us as to why Christ died: "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls", 1 Peter 2:24-25 (English Standard Version).

The seeking and compassionate Father

In the majority of Bibles, this section of the parable is entitled by the publishers "The Parable of the Prodigal Son". The younger son is an accurate picture of what each one of us is like in our rebellious state before God, dead in our trespasses and in our sins. As we have seen, the work of the Holy Spirit is to awake us to this reality. It happened with the prodigal son: "when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants"', Luke 15:17-19. When he took the long journey back from the far country, he found his father had been watching out for him: "while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate", Luke 15:20-23. What a wonderful description of how God the Father receives the repentant sinner! And how full the blessings freely bestowed by God the Father through the Gospel!

- The best robe – His righteousness in Christ, (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- The ring – the token of His eternal love.
- The shoes – the adoption of sons (slaves would be bare footed).
- The fatted calf – the righteous basis for all God's actions, the death of His Son.

Rejoice with Me

Before leaving this parable, we need to establish how we can imitate a God who rejoices. In verses 6, 9 and 23 God invites others to join in the celebrations of the repentance of sinners for each person is precious to Him. These are the angels, the friends and the neighbours in the parable. Paul rejoiced when Christ was preached (Philippians 1:18). In my childhood and youth I attended a Gospel Hall in Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne. (Yes, the Byker made notorious by the television programme, *Byker Grove*.) In those days, whenever a person was converted at the Gospel meeting, the hymn "O Happy Day" was sung by the congregation. It was a way of responding to God's invitation to rejoice with Him over the lost being found. They were very moving, memorable occasions. How much prayer time do we devote to rejoicing in the success of the Gospel in the world in bringing people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18)?

Are there other situations when God rejoiced or will rejoice?**Yes! God rejoiced at Creation**

“When I laid the foundation of the earth...the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy” says God in Job 38:4 and 7. God delighted in His work of creation. When, on the sixth day, He surveyed everything that He had made, the Holy Spirit records: “and, behold, it was very good”, Genesis 1:31. It seems that God singled out man as a special object of His rejoicing: “When [I] established the heavens...when [I] drew a circle on the face of the deep, when [I] made firm the skies above, when [I] established the fountains of the deep, when [I] assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress [My] command, when [I] marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was...rejoicing in [the] inhabitable world and delighting in the children of man”, Proverbs 8:27-31. How sorrowful it must have been for God when, soon afterwards, He lost Adam to sin and had to call out in the Garden of Eden: “Where are you?” Genesis 3:9. By contrast, how great His rejoicing when He says: “once lost but now found” about each repentant sinner!

If God rejoices in all that He has created, then creation must be a source of rejoicing for us also - just like the Psalmist: “O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures...These all look to you, to give them their food in due season ... May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works”, Psalm 104:24, 27 and 31.

God also rejoiced at the Incarnation

The angelic hosts were vocal again when the Lord Jesus Christ was born. Here was the Redeemer stepping into His creation to deal with the problem of sin. “The angel said to the [shepherds], ‘I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord’...And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’”, Luke 2:10–11 and 13-14. If the angels were rejoicing, that means that God was rejoicing in the birth of His Son – it was His first step to seek and to save the lost! As believers we should imitate our God and rejoice continuously in the Incarnation – not only at the traditional Christmas season!

The Lord Jesus Christ rejoiced over His Disciples

When the 72 disciples returned with joy to their Master and reported that their mission had been accomplished, Luke 10:21-24 records: “In that same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’. Then turning to the disciples He said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it’”.

As Christ’s disciples we are to imitate Him in every way (1 Corinthians 11:1). Are we actively rejoicing in Christian believers in the same way that Paul was when he called the Philippian and the Thessalonian believers his beloved, his joy and his crown of rejoicing? He rejoiced over their sound Christian testimony and their faithful service for the Lord.

The Lord Jesus also rejoiced in God at His Death and Resurrection!

Perhaps we don’t immediately associate rejoicing as an experience of our Saviour during His death and resurrection, but, in his preaching on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Psalm 16 on this subject. He said during his preaching: “God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. For David foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ”, “‘I saw the Lord always before Me, for He is at My right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore My heart was glad, and My tongue rejoiced; My flesh also will dwell in hope. For You will not abandon My soul to Hades, or let Your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to Me the paths of life; You will make Me full of gladness with Your presence’”, Acts 2:24–28, 31.

Surely the main focus of our rejoicing as Christian believers is about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from among the dead and His ascension to God’s right hand in heaven.

God will rejoice in the Millennium

The future for a repentant, forgiven and restored nation of Israel will be one of millennial Messianic blessing. At that time the prophets Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Isaiah indicate that God will rejoice in Israel. For example: “Sing aloud, O

daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing"', Zephaniah 3:14-17. But after the broadcast look up Jeremiah 32:41, Isaiah 62:3-5 and 65:17-19.

As Christians we wait in hope for that day when the Lord Jesus returns. Then at His Appearing, God will reverse all the problems that the Fall introduced into this world. But we can rejoice now in all that God will do then through His King established in Zion, which will be the joy of the whole earth (Psalm 48:2).

Finally, my first thoughts about imitating a God who rejoices

God is a God who rejoices in all that He has done; in all that He is doing; and in all that He is yet to do. He rejoices because His Son is the centre of all His eternal purposes. But He includes His people in Christ's inheritance. We imitate His pleasure in this when we speak well of Him and use language such as:

- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you", 1 Peter 1:3-4.
- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved", Ephesians 1:3-6.
- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God", 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

In other words, we rejoice in the things which God does for His own pleasure for this includes the blessings of His people. This rejoicing is true spiritual worship and it brings us back again to think about the Father in the parable who finds lost sinners and makes them sons in His house commanding: "Let us rejoice!"

Let's finish by using J G Deck's hymn of worship "Abba, Father":

*Abba, Father, we approach Thee
In our Saviour's precious name;
We, Thy children, here assembling,
Now the promised blessing claim.
From our guilt His blood has washed us,
'Tis through Him our souls draw nigh;
And Thy Spirit too has taught us
"Abba, Father", thus to cry.*

*Once as prodigals we wandered
In our folly far from Thee;
But Thy grace, o'er sin abounding,
Rescued us from misery;
Thou the prodigals hast pardoned,
Kissed us with a Father's love;
Killed the fatted calf, and called us
E'er to dwell with Thee above.*

*Clothed in garments of salvation,
At Thy table is our place;
We rejoice, and Thou rejoicest,
In the riches of Thy grace.
"It is meet", we hear Thee saying,
"We should merry be and glad;
I have found My once lost children,
Now they live who once were dead."*

*Abba, Father, we adore Thee,
While the hosts in heaven above
E'en in us now learn the wonders
Of Thy wisdom, grace, and love.
Soon before Thy throne assembled,
All Thy children shall proclaim
Abba's love as shown in Jesus,
And how full is Abba's name!*

Please Note: We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.