


Christ the Savior

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8–13

Background Scripture: John 3:14–17; 10:9–11, 14–16, 27–28



Luke 15:3–7

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Romans 5:6–10

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!



Key Text

If, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! —Romans 5:10

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 1: Our God and the Holy Scriptures

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the paradox that Jesus is both shepherd and sacrifice.
2. Give examples of ways believers might experience Christ's rescue.
3. Make a plan to resist complacency and resolve conflict according to Christ's reconciling example.

Lesson Outline

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- B. Lesson Context: Luke 15
- C. Lesson Context: Romans

I. The Seeking Shepherd (Luke 15:3–7)

- A. Lost Sheep (vv. 3–4)
Missing Lamb
- B. Found Sheep (v. 5)
- C. Communal Rejoicing (v. 6)
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II. The Self-Giving Son (Romans 5:6–10)

- A. Sacrifice for Sinners (vv. 6–8)
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Conclusion

- A. Coming Home
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Introduction

A. Rescues and Rejoicing

On October 13, 2010, the first of 33 men emerged from a collapsed mine in Chile. They had been trapped for nearly 10 weeks. When the rescue drill reached the underground chamber where the men had been confined, a siren announced the breakthrough. Families of the miners celebrated as the men emerged one by one. All had survived! The US president spoke of “the joy of people everywhere” as they heard the news of the successful multinational rescue effort.

Dramatic rescues capture the attention of people around the world. Such outcomes elicit great celebration. Today's lesson calls attention to the most important rescue effort of all time: Jesus' rescue mission on behalf of lost humanity.

B. Lesson Context: Luke 15

The first of our two printed texts for this lesson is drawn from a sequence of three “lost and found” parables that constitute the entirety of Luke 15. An element common to all three parables is the joy that occurs when that which was lost is found.

Jesus spoke these parables while on his final trip to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–56). It was a lengthy journey, but the crucifixion was near. Matthew 18:12–14 is another version of today's parable.

C. Lesson Context: Romans

Paul's letter to the church in Rome was most likely written in AD 57 or 58. During Paul's third missionary journey, he spent about three months in Greece (Acts 20:1–3). This may have been the time during which he wrote this letter. He had never visited the church in Rome, but he planned to (Romans 1:8–13).

Many consider Romans to be Paul's most outstanding epistle. It is a profound doctrinal treatise, dealing with many aspects of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:5). The universal sinfulness of humanity was the issue (1:18–3:20). The remedy is “the righteousness of God” that comes to individuals through their faith in Jesus (3:21–24). The printed text leads us to explore the intersection of these facts.

I. The Seeking Shepherd

(Luke 15:3–7)

The previous chapter of Luke ends with Jesus offering a strong word of caution to count the cost before deciding to follow him (Luke 14:25–33). His words likely shock many in the audience, especially the part about carrying a cross (14:27)!

Even so, chapter 15 begins, “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus” (Luke 15:1). Apparently, Jesus’ candid language about what true discipleship means does not dissuade his audience from wanting to hear more. On the other hand, the religious leaders “muttered” against Jesus because of his willingness to welcome such “sinners” and even eat with them (15:2).

A. Lost Sheep (vv. 3–4)

3. Then Jesus told them this parable:

The word *them* in this phrase points us to “the Pharisees and the teachers of the law” in Luke 15:2. It is worth noting that Jesus was not the first to teach in parables (compare Judges 9:7–15; 2 Kings 14:9–10), but his authoritative use of this method characterizes much of his teaching.

4. “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?”

The hypothetical setting of the parable resonates well with those of a preindustrial era when the majority of people lived on farms. Indeed, that fact of drawing on images of common life is foundational to what makes a parable a parable. Beyond this foundation, however, there is disagreement on a precise definition.

The imagery of a shepherd leaving 99 sheep in search of 1 is startling—and that’s exactly the shock effect that is intended. Much is left unsaid here. Were there other workers available to watch over the 99 during the search? How long would the shepherd be willing to search before giving up? These and other questions are neither posed nor necessary. The emphasis is God’s intense concern for the lost, a concern the Pharisees lack. The expertise of these men should cause them

to remember the shepherd-and-sheep imagery in their own Scriptures (compare Psalms 23; 119:176; Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34:11–16).

Missing Lamb

My daughter received a stuffed lamb as a gift at a baby shower. When she got old enough to notice the lamb, she immediately loved it. She held it every night when she was falling asleep. She chewed on its ears and nose. When she got a little older, she dressed it in doll clothes and took it to Sunday school with her. The lamb was her constant companion—until the day it disappeared.

We had gone to the park. When we came home, it was not in the car seat, the diaper bag, or the stroller. During her nap time, I left her with my husband, and then frantically drove back to the park to look for the lamb. Unfortunately, it was gone forever.

I searched for that stuffed lamb but never found it. However, the shepherd in this parable found his lost sheep. We have a “good shepherd” (John 10:14) who takes care of his flock, searching out those who are lost. In contrasting Christianity with other religions, it’s been noted that while other religions feature humans’ search for God, Christianity features God’s search for us. Are you willing to be found, or are you hiding?
—L. M. W.

B. Found Sheep (v. 5)

5. “And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders”

As we work our way through this parable, it is essential that we keep in mind the original audiences—plural, because there are two. The audience of Luke 15:1 is eager to hear Jesus; the audience of 15:2 is eager to criticize him. The lamb that was found represents those of 15:1. Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), and that’s exactly what he’s doing here—something the audience of 15:2 disapproves.

Again, we are cautious not to fill in details that we think should be in the parable. For example, some may doubt that a sheep weighing between 100 and 200 pounds could be carried on one’s

shoulders. But that imagery is part of the shock value of the parable. The imagery is designed to get Jesus' hearers to think as they identify the characters in the story with those of real life.

C. Communal Rejoicing (v. 6)

6. “and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

The wording here is nearly identical to that of Luke 15:9, which describes shared joy at the recovery of a lost coin. Good news is always worth sharing. Indeed, the language of shared joy and celebration permeates the three parables of Luke 15, with nine references in total (see 15:5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 23, 24, 29, 32; see also Lesson 6). Luke 15 is one of three points in Luke’s Gospel where the call to rejoice is especially stressed; the other two places are found in Luke 1–2 and Luke 6:23. The contrast in attitude with that of the dour Pharisees could hardly be more striking. To them, sinners are to be marginalized, avoided, shunned, and condemned, not sought out!

What Do You Think?

What do you find most striking about this parable?

Digging Deeper

What about God’s character is revealed in what stands out to you?

D. Sinners Like Sheep (v. 7)

7. “I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Jesus now gives the application of his brief parable, which applies to the two main groups listening to him: the “sinners” and the religious leaders. The one sheep that had strayed represents *one sinner* who has strayed from the Father in heaven. When that sinner repents (changes course to return to the Lord), there is *rejoicing in heaven*.

Again, we resist the temptation to press other ideas into the lesson that Jesus is teaching. For example, we realize that everyone has sinned and

is in need of repentance (Acts 2:38; Romans 3:23; etc.). Therefore, how can Jesus properly compare one sinner *who repents* with a fictitious group *who do not need to repent*?

What Jesus is doing is reflecting the self-image of the *ninety-nine righteous persons*—the religious leaders who speak against him and his actions. It is not that these leaders need no repentance; rather, they believe that they do not need to repent. This makes their spiritual condition even worse (John 9:39–41). Those who have truly repented should not feel superior to the unrepentant. If anything, their compassion should increase, for they know the freedom from sin that repentance brings. They should desire to see others experience that same freedom.

A shepherd’s concern for one lost sheep, while touching, pales in comparison to God’s desire to reach lost people. It is clear from Jesus’ words elsewhere, especially in John 10:1–18, that he is the shepherd who has come to rescue lost sheep. Luke records the following words of Jesus, spoken while in the house of the transformed Zacchaeus: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

What Do You Think?

Which group do you more easily see yourself in—the “sinners” or the “righteous persons”?

Digging Deeper

How does this parable invite you to respond?

II. The Self-Giving Son

(Romans 5:6–10)

Romans 5 begins with one of Paul’s favorite methods of argumentation: the use of the word *therefore* to summarize a point in the sense of “consequently” or “accordingly.” Thus, it behooves us to take a quick look at the reason for this “therefore” before we consider what flows from it.

The reasoning behind the “therefore” of Romans 5:1 is Paul’s citing Abraham as an example of someone whose faith “was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3). Paul closes the chapter by

building a bridge from Abraham to the followers of Jesus. Just as righteousness was “credited” to Abraham by faith (4:20–22), so it will be credited to those who “believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (4:24). That faith allows us to have “gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (5:2). Our printed text expands on the wonder of God’s grace by contrasting our position before God prior to Jesus’ death with where we now stand because of his death.

A. Sacrifice for Sinners (vv. 6–8)

6. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

The verse’s opening *you see* of this section signals additional information to the “therefore” of Romans 5:1. The additional information deals with an intersection of *time* and our lack of strength. Paul first pictures the desperation of our condition before Jesus’ atoning death on the cross: *when we were still powerless*. This is not measuring physical strength, but spiritual. Sin renders every human incapable of saving oneself. It is another way to say what Paul states in Romans 3:23, that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” By this standard, the most righteous of human beings is as much in need as the wickedest.

The adjective translated *ungodly*, used to describe humanity’s condition, is fairly rare in the New Testament (other occurrences in Romans 4:5; 1 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 4:18; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:7; and Jude 4, 15). This refers to a life lived without regard for God-honoring beliefs and practices. No one is exempt from being so characterized.

The solution to our sad condition is this: *Christ died for the ungodly*. The timing of that event was carefully planned by God, as Galatians 4:4 establishes: “When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son” (compare Mark 1:15; Romans 4:25; Ephesians 1:10).

Christ’s dying for the ungodly is his substitutionary death on the cross, an essential element of the gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:3). The prophecy of Jesus’ death in Isaiah 53 is perhaps the most powerful description of that event in Scripture, even though Isaiah issued it sev-

eral hundred years before Jesus came to earth. Romans 5:1 notes the peace with God that we have through Jesus. Here, in verse 6, Jesus’ death is connected to that peace, as expressed in Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 53:5).

Paul’s insight is that while the enemies of Jesus had nothing but malice in their hearts, God had planned all along for his Son’s death to be the means of salvation for humanity. The high priest spoke better than he knew when he declared that it was better for one man to die than to have an entire nation perish (John 11:49–53).

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you think people value individual strength or power?

Digging Deeper

What is the significance of Christ dying for us when we were “still powerless” (Romans 5:6)?

7. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

One issue within this verse is the difference between a *righteous person* and a *good person*. Some suggest that the righteous person describes an especially pious individual who possesses a “holier-than-thou” attitude. He may be highly respected, but he is not the kind of person for whom someone would be willing *to die*. The good person would be someone whose good deeds make her a much more likable individual, and, thus, a person for whom others would be more likely to die.

Others suggest that there is basically no difference between the righteous person and the good person, and that Paul is making the same claim in two different ways. The first part of the verse states Paul’s claim in a negative way; the second states it positively. Regardless of the exact distinction between the “righteous person” and the “good person,” the gist of Paul’s statement is that people are not likely to give their lives on behalf of even the best of human beings.

8. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Reading this verse with the previous two, we can see the contrast Paul desires to make. It is not so much between the righteous person and the good person as it is between the good (and righteous) people of verse 7 and the ungodly people of verse 6. If the chances of someone dying for a good or righteous person are so slim, then the chances of someone dying for an ungodly person are laughable. Herein lies the contrast.

We see the incredible *love* God has shown to all humanity—all of whom are *sinners*—in the fact that *Christ died for us*. Self-help is out of the question; before receiving his salvation, we are all dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1, 4–5). We need a Savior!

Paul himself never lost his sense of wonder and gratitude for Jesus’ death. The grace that resulted saved him from a sinful past that included the persecution and murder of Christians (Acts 9:1–2; 22:4–5; 26:9–11; 1 Corinthians 15:9). He referred to himself as the “worst” of sinners but also the recipient of grace that was “poured out on me abundantly” (1 Timothy 1:14–15).

What Do You Think?
What is more surprising: that Christ died for us, or that this happened while we were still sinners?

Digging Deeper
What is the significance of Christ dying for sinners?

A Life for a Life

A little girl was walking with her father down a sidewalk along a busy street. They came to a crosswalk and started to cross. Halfway across the street, the girl caught sight of a balloon floating above them and stopped just as a car barreled down the street toward her. Seeing the danger, her father ran to push her out of the path of the car to safety. Tragically, the car hit her father, killing him instead.

The girl grew up with the memory of the accident and the knowledge that her father gave his own life for hers. Initially, she felt shame that he had died because of her inattention and carelessness. It was not until she had her own child that

she realized the depth of her father’s love. She would willingly do the same for her baby. Only when she realized that was she able to be free from shame.

Jesus willingly sacrificed his life for each of us, thereby paying the debt for our sin. How will you live in the knowledge of that love daily, free from the guilt and shame of sin? —L. M. W.

B. Saving Former Enemies (vv. 9–10)

9. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

Romans 5 begins with Paul’s declaration that we are “justified through faith” (Romans 5:1). Here, he adds that we are *justified by Jesus’ blood*. To be *justified* is both to be pardoned from all sin (and thus reconciled to God) and to be counted as righteous. Because Jesus died in our place, we are free from condemnation (3:25; 4:25; 8:1). In this vein, some describe “justified” as being treated “just as if I’d never sinned.”

The means of our justification is Jesus’ blood. The blood of Jesus given at the cross is the price paid to cleanse us from our sins (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; 1 Peter 1:18–19; etc.). Just as God saw the blood on the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and declared, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13), he will “pass over” us when he sees the blood of Jesus covering us (1 Corinthians 5:7). We will not be judged according to our sins. Rather, we will *be saved from God’s wrath* (compare Romans 1:18).

10. For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-losh-unz.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).
Ezekiel	Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.
Jeremiah	Jair-uh-my-uh.
Pharisees	Fair-ih-seez.
Zacchaeus	Zack-key-us.

This verse continues a pattern from verses 6 and 8, above: *while we were* most unfit for saving, God in Jesus Christ took the necessary action to save us. Building on this idea, Paul introduces another term to picture the impact of Jesus’ death: *reconciled*. This Greek word occurs six times in the New Testament, and the first two of those are right here. Three more occurrences are in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, which goes into more depth about the concept of reconciliation (compare 1 Corinthians 7:11).

To be considered *enemies* of God is terrifying—or it should be. Many passages of Scripture speak of God being with us and for us (Psalm 23:4; Matthew 1:23; Romans 8:31; etc.). But there are also passages that speak of his being against sinners (Jeremiah 21:13; Ezekiel 13:8; 21:3; etc.). In the verse before us, Paul declares that it is God who has taken the initiative to remove what results in this enmity: the sin barrier. That means of reconciliation is *the death of his Son* (see also Colossians 1:19–22). This introduces the concept of Christ’s “intercession,” covered in more depth in Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25.



Visual for Lesson 3. *Display this visual as you ask, “Explain how Jesus is both our seeking Shepherd and sacrificial lamb.”*

what allows a spiritual homecoming. Those who accept Jesus’ sacrifice according to the biblical plan of salvation become reconciled to God. The sin barrier no longer stands. They are at peace with him. They have come back to their Creator, back to where they belong. They are home spiritually and are destined for the eternal home being prepared for all faithful followers of Jesus (John 14:1–3).

For many, “coming home” is a vital part of the Christmas season. The real message of Christmas is that our heavenly Father has provided a way for every person to “come home” to him: the gift of Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). God wants to be for us! He proved that desire in the death of his Son. Everyone in rebellion against God is a lost sheep. But Christ specializes in finding lost sheep. What is your part in being his hands and feet in that regard?

What Do You Think?

- What does Jesus’ *death* accomplish?
- What does Jesus’ *life* accomplish?

Digging Deeper

- What does this teach us about the importance of both Jesus’ death and resurrection?

Conclusion

A. Coming Home

A homecoming is often a time of great joy. Think of those miners in Chile whose dramatic rescue was recounted in the Introduction. But such earthly celebrations pale in comparison to celebrations in heaven over the repentance of a sinner, an enemy of God. The angels themselves join the celebration!

Strictly speaking, Paul does not use homecoming language in Romans 5. But the reconciliation made possible through Jesus’ death is

B. Prayer

Father, in this season of gift-giving, we acknowledge that you have given the gift of all gifts in your Son, Jesus. We look beyond the manger to the cross and empty tomb, declaring with gratitude that “Christ died for us.” In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus is both the seeking Shepherd and the sacrificial Lamb.