

*15Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3So he told them this parable: 4"Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

Nothing pleased my father more than when a job was well done.

Lynn, sweep out the garage today, was his request. And when he came home if the garage was clean he would notice, and smile.

That his children were hard workers brought him joy.

My mother took joy in my learning. My reading a book mattered more to her than work I did with my hands.

I loved my parents. What brought them joy shaped my life.

God's people have always been shaped by what they believed brought joy to God.

Noah offered a sacrifice when the flood was over. The odor of the burnt offering was pleasing to the Lord, we read.

David wrote psalms, sang them to the Lord in whom he trusted. David's voice raised in praise was pleasing, he believed.

Solomon built a temple. The finest materials in all creation he used. He built at God's command, to bring God honor, to bring God joy.

In every age laws were given, prophets spoke, priests acted, the people followed, all to bring God joy.

Now it is your turn. You join your voice to songs of praise, you guard your thoughts and words and deeds against sin, against those things that would displease the Lord. You gather here, you give yourself and your time all so that God might have joy in you. Like Noah and David and Solomon and millions more you seek to bring your creator pleasure.

That is what the Pharisees and scribes were seeking that day. The Lord had called them to be a holy people, a people set apart. God was without sin, they spent all their efforts to be like God in this very way, confident that their righteousness would bring God the greatest joy.

I know what that is like. As a teenager I believed that nothing mattered more to God than my not giving in to temptation. Pure thoughts, pure words, no sinful deeds, all my energy went into my own holiness. Maybe you have tried that too, believing God wants us to be good, above all.

To do that I needed to watch who I was with. Sitting around all night listening to dirty jokes would not be much help for my purity. Purity meant not following with the crowd - being separate.

All for God, to bring joy to God.

If you know what that is like then you can understand the Pharisees that day. Jesus was surrounded by the wrongs sorts of people. The Pharisees grumbled, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told the parable, "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have

found my sheep that was lost.' Just so I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

They thought God's greatest joy was their righteousness. Jesus said it was a sinner's return.

So what could they do? Join the celebration? Share God's joy that tax collectors and sinners did want to eat with Jesus, and talk with him?

In many ways we are the ninety-nine. Many of us have believed and followed and sought to bring God joy year after year. And now Jesus says God has greater joy in one sinner turning to Jesus than in ninety-nine of us. More joy in one sinner's moment of turning than in all of my hours and days and years of trying.

What can I do? I could pout. Or I could pray for a clean heart, a new and right spirit that will give me the same joy that is God's when someone comes to believe in Jesus Christ. I could join Jesus in seeking to turn the hearts of sinners to God - that God's joy might be mine.

And yours.

Our joy in the lost being found.