

UNIFORM

Sunday School Lesson

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Swannanoa, N. C.

Lesson for Sunday, Jan. 29:
"God's Concern for Sinners."

Lesson Text: Luke 15:1-32.

Two groups stand out in this lesson, and in between an individual. On one side are the Pharisees and the scribes—"the godly" as they liked to call themselves. On the other side were the publicans—tax gatherers and sinners; both called the "ungodly" by the "godly." In between stands Jesus. The attitude of both groups to-

ward Jesus needs a word of comment. The Pharisees and scribes are down on Jesus. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Jesus claimed to be a religious teacher. He did not protest when men called him "Rabbi." But for a Rabbi to "receive sinners and eat with them" was unthinkable. And for a devout Jew to have any social contact with a tax gatherer—that simply wasn't done in polite society. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, neither did they with the tax gatherers and sinners. Let's look at them and their attitude toward Jesus. "Then drew near unto him



inside. That makes the difference. It is a sentimental difference.

"Lost." A lost sheep and a lost coin. Not valued certainly by the market price. The coin and the sheep had a value far beyond that. And, remember, Jesus is only incidentally talking about sheep and coin. He is really talking about sinners—the despised tax gatherers, who make their living off their fellow Jews; those sinners who fail to keep the law. "Of how much more value is a man than a sheep?" "The godly" looked on "the ungodly," and thought of them only in terms of their labor value, and they might not use them even for the menial service they might render. "A man is worth \$2.00 an hour from his head down; there is no limit to what he is worth from his shoulders up." What part of his body are you looking at when you try to appraise his value? The scribes and Pharisees "looked on the outward appearance" and they didn't see anything worth looking at. Jesus "looked on the heart" and what he saw had infinite worth. These who had no value in the market had value in heaven, far beyond the ninety and nine. Those who were despised on earth were rejoiced over in heaven. Because they were more than lost sheep. They were lost men. They were more than lost men. They were lost sinners. And that is tragedy.

all the publicans and the sinners for to hear him." What was he saying? Was he talking to the whole group—Pharisees, scribes, publicans and sinners—or were his remarks addressed only to the latter? We don't know. Nothing is told us about what Jesus said up to the point where he began talking to them in parables. But we may be sure of this: the message of Jesus had in it both censure and comfort. Censure for the "godly" for their ungodly attitude toward the other group; comfort for the "sinners" because the "godly" distrusted and despised them. "I am come to preach the gospel to the poor." "I am come to release the prisoners." "I am come to seek and to save the lost." His friendly attitude toward them drew them to him. These parables are a defense of his attitude, a statement of his purpose.

Let's look at the parables from that standpoint. In many respects they are very much alike; only the details are different. Both are dramas in three acts. The first act is the tragedy of loss, the second act is the grief-stricken search, the third act is joy. Let's think of them that way.

1. The tragedy of loss. Did you ever lose anything? A dime, a knife, a wedding ring, a billfold? If you did, you soon discovered that most things have two values. One we might call its market value; the other its sentimental value. Your father gave you that knife. He paid a dollar for it. But because he gave it to you, you wouldn't sell it for any price. He cannot give you another; it cannot be replaced. Your father is no longer with you, and you loved him dearly. And that wedding ring! Your husband is still with you. He has the money to buy a dozen wedding rings. But the one you lost he put on your finger and said, "With this ring I thee wed." I have a watch. I have never lost it. I have had it for 40 years. It is a good watch, one of the best made. But I put a tax value of ten dollars on it. It wouldn't be worth more than that to anyone who might try to buy it. But to me it is invaluable. I wouldn't part with it for a hundred times ten dollars. But the thing that makes it valuable to me makes it of less worth to anybody else. It has my initials in the form of a monogram on the back lid, and an inscription

How deep were the waters crossed; Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed thru' Ere he found His sheep that was lost." Yes, all the way to Gethsemane and the bloody sweat; all the way to Calvary and the agony. He could not find his sheep until he hung on the cross. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to (find and) save sinners." "Christ took our sins and bore them in his own body on the tree."

3. The third act in the drama is rejoicing. "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," over every sinner that is saved. Every once in a while a child is reported lost in the mountains or the desert. It may be lost for days. The papers are full of the search-hundreds out looking for the child. Sometimes they are too late. The child's body is found—that is all. But if it is still alive, what relief and rejoicing, nation-wide, as the papers carry the story of rescue. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were as much concerned with saving a child's soul as we are its body? And if we were half as joyful here on earth as the angels are in heaven! The trouble is, of course, that we do not know the worth of a soul, Jesus and the angels do.

But there is an interesting word here: the word "repenteth." "One sinner that repenteth." Both parables have that sentence and that word. They start out as if the woman and the shepherd had it all to do. One searching for the coin, the other for the sheep. But it appears both the sheep and the coin have something to do with being found. "Repentance" you remember means "sorry for sin." A man

becomes sorry not only for his sins, but sorry that he is a sinner. He can't be saved until he is. You might bring home a lost coin or a lost sheep by main force, even against its will. Men can't be saved that way. He has something to do with "working out" his own salvation. He must start with repentance. Christ can not do that for him. There was no hope for the prodigal until "he came to himself" and arose and came to the Father.

There is much in the process of salvation that man cannot do. But there is something that he alone can do: turn back to God; help God find him.

That leads to a couple of questions we ought to ask before we close this discussion. "Can men be saved?" Yes, any man all men. "The publicans and sinners." Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He puts no limits on who the lost are. It includes all who have sinned—and all have sinned—no matter what that sin is. But another question must be asked. "What must I do to be saved?" Paul's answer to that question was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Is that enough, or ought we to go a little farther? "Repent and believe the gospel." That was what Christ said as he began his ministry. It includes the other. But it makes the lost want to be found—through repentance and faith.

—Tar Heel peanut farmers can plant only 168,813 acres of peanuts next year if they use the full state allotment.

AUXILIARY VALENTINE PARTY
Waycaster-McFee American Legion Auxiliary met Monday night, Jan. 16, with the president, Mrs. J. B. Bullock, who also presided during the meeting. Members voted to give Mrs. June Glenn's Girl Scout troop a Valentine party. The Auxiliary sponsors this troop. Mrs. Clarence Joyner, assisted by Mrs. H. E. Stinchcomb, will be in charge. It was announced that the Auxiliary would sponsor the teen-age programs at the club house on March 24 and June 25. Several letters of appreciation from veteran's families receiving help from the local unit were read by the president.

MRS. JUSTUS HOSTESS TO TABERNACLE WSCS
The Woman's Society of Christian Service of the Tabernacle Methodist church met on Tuesday, Jan. 16, with Mrs. Percy Justus, Mrs. H. D. Smith, president, presided. Mrs. Justus gave the worship service and Miss Ruth Wooten, Bible teacher in the Black Mountain schools, taught the study taken from the Book of Corinthians. A fellowship meeting to be held Tuesday night, Jan. 31, at 7:30 was announced. Also a sandwich supper to be held Sunday.

Refreshments were served by Mrs. Justus to the following members: Mrs. George Culbreth, Mrs. Mrs. Stanley, Mrs. Claude Brooks, N. C. Stanley, Mrs. G. C. Quesinberry, Mrs. Garland Reed, Mrs. W. H. Propst, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. E. W. Jackson, and Miss Wooten.

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