

Kings and Prophets 13-07-26b

We pick up our study now in 1 Kings 17 looking at Elijah and noting the wonderful symmetry of God's dealing with the people in the northern kingdom. And I ask the question, why is God going to all this trouble for the people that seem to be least interested in Him? If you keep your finger here in 1 Kings 17, turn with me just for a moment to Luke 15. The Lord Jesus has an answer for us to this question.

Luke 15. If you look at the headings in your Bible, and hopefully you have a Bible with headings, you will notice that chapter 15 of Luke begins with the parable of the lost sheep. This is sheep singular.

Ninety and nine safely lay in the shelter of the fold, but no one was lost on the hills far away. Followed by the parable of the lost coin. The woman who has the beautiful headdress and one of the coins falls off and she's shining a light, sweeping the floor, looking all over the place, crawling around her hands and knees trying to find it.

And then you have the parable of the lost son. And in all three cases, Jesus makes the point. He spells it out explicitly after the lost sheep and the lost coin.

And what does he say in verse 7 of Luke 15? I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 just persons who need no repentance. That's what he says after the parable of the lost sheep. The man that loses the sheep, he goes and he finds it, brings it back, encourages his neighbors to rejoice with him, calls his friends and neighbors, rejoice with me, I have found my sheep which was lost.

Then Jesus tells the parable of the lost coin. The woman having ten silver coins, she loses one. When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together saying rejoice with me for I have found the piece which I lost.

This is a shared joy. Let me ask you something. If you lose something like your keys, your credit card, your phone, your glasses, your wedding ring, your class ring, your purse, your wallet, something that you set some store by and then you find it, are you happy? Are you filled with a sense of joy, relief, etc.? What's the added element in these two parables? Both the man with the sheep and the woman with the coin call their friends and neighbors and say what? Rejoice with me.

And don't we typically do this when we find a thing? We say, oh, I was so worried and here it is. I'm thanking God that he let me find it, thanking God that it wasn't stolen or fell in the middle of a deep lake or something never to be retrieved. I saw, this is apropos of nothing, but I saw a thing on the web.

I was researching something. You never know what you're going to hit. You're trying to look up one thing.

They keep throwing other stuff at you. But a lady was on her 30th birthday, and her husband took her to the lake, and she saw a camera floating in the water, had no idea who it belonged to. So she got the pictures off it and posted them on Facebook or something, and it kind of got picked up.

The local news picked it up and said, who are these people? Well, the people that had lost the camera saw the pictures. They got with the people that found the camera, got all the rest of the pictures out of it, got the camera back, and they were very happy to have gotten this stuff back. And this is what you can do in the digital age.

The kind of cameras I buy for my wife don't float. Don't ask me how I know that. But there is celebration, and Jesus is answering our question.

Now, what's the third parable in this chapter 15 of Luke? It's the lost son, the prodigal son. And at the end of that, does it say, Behold, I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. Jesus doesn't really have to say it the third time, because the whole parable is a picture of the celebration, where the father slays the fatted calf.

It's built into the parable that the father wants others to celebrate with him his joy at recovering his lost son. So you have a threefold emphasis on this. Now, what do you want to be? Do you want to be a just person that needs no repentance, or do you want to be a sinner? Should we go and sin and go way out in the weeds, just so we can come back and God will have celebrating in heaven that we have returned? What's the real point of this parable? What should we think as a result of these three parables that Jesus tells? There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 just persons who need no repentance.

Now, think about that. Is God happier about some profligate, wastrel, evil, indulging, disobedient, bad guy that finally comes to his senses and returns? He's more pleased with that guy than he is with us if we're faithful and obedient, and day by day we pursue our understanding of the Lord Jesus and try to walk and have His mind in us and do all the things the Bible encourages. We lay ourselves on the altar, Romans 12, 1 and 2. Is God really happier over somebody that screws everything up and then comes back than over those who are really working at their spiritual life all the time? What do you think? Is that what Jesus is saying in these parables? What do you think? Yes or no? You know it's dangerous to say yes, that's what He's teaching.

That's why nobody is saying yes. But it kind of makes you wonder, doesn't it? What is He talking about? God would rather see somebody completely go up in flames and then emerge like the phoenix than somebody to burn as a lamp from the very beginning? Is that it? No. When you look at the context, when we did the Gospel Loop, we looked at this in context, what is He saying? From the standpoint of the person, look at it this way.

How interested are you in creating joy in heaven? How interested are we in pleasing our Father in heaven? Well, if we're any kind of person that we ought to be, that's all we care about is God

in heaven being pleased with us, right? So when Jesus tells a parable like this and you say, well, but I think I've been doing pretty well. I go to Bible class. I pray.

I confess my sins. I'm learning. I'm growing.

And why can't I be the sinner that goes away and God's going to rejoice? What does the parable engender? What does Jesus' interpretation and the moral of the story, what does it engender in somebody who really wants to please God? Well, can't I be that repenting person? And then we go one step further and say, well, do I really need no repentance at all? Isn't there something I can have a change of mind about and do better? Or am I, I'm done. I'm not a work in progress. I'm finished.

I'm the completed temple. The Shekinah has filled me. The priests are functioning.

I'm all done. Is there anybody who is not a sinner who needs repentance? No. There is more joy in heaven over us when we recognize that we are sinners and we need repentance than over 99 people who never close that loop, who never do that self-investigation and find out where do I still need work? Where do I still need to be humble? Where do I still need to submit myself under the mighty hand of God so that He can exalt me? Where do I need to confess so that He can purge me and cleanse me and make me white as snow? Where are the rocks that need the hammer and the fire of God's word? We are all sinners.

We all need repentance. And there is joy in heaven when we recognize that we are all the lost sheep. We are all the lost coin.

And when we are returned to God, when we come back, you know, the sheep doesn't have a mind of its own, literally. The coin doesn't have a mind of its own. It's in the third parable with the son that says, I will return to my father.

That's the cause for celebration. The father is not just celebrating the son's return. He's really celebrating his son's change of mind.

That's why when the son that stuck around the whole time says, well, father, when did you ever slay a calf for me? When did you ever? The father probably would have a celebration if that son ever had a change of mind. It's change of mind that is being celebrated. It is return that is being celebrated.

And three times in this chapter, Jesus states and illustrates, there is joy in heaven when those who have gone astray come to their senses, think about God, decide that they want to please Him, return to Him in humility and laying a claim on God's grace, and then God can rejoice. There is joy in heaven when we acknowledge our failures, our shortcomings, our sins, and throw ourselves on God's mercy. We allow Him to collect us back where we belong.

The coin is back with the other nine. The sheep is back with the other 99. The son is back in the father's household.

That creates joy. So now, flip back. You kept your finger in 1 Kings 17.

Why does God send six double signs to the northern kingdom, and now He's sending a seventh most powerful double sign in the person of Elijah to be followed by Elisha? What is God after? What is He trying to engender and create in the northern kingdom that He doesn't need to do so much down in the south? A change of mind. There will be joy in heaven if these people will acknowledge their sin that has been encouraged, caused, quote-unquote, by their leadership, beginning with Jeroboam, and they are willing co-conspirators with Jeroboam in creating a false system of worship, a false priesthood, false altars, false gods, these calves at Dan and Bethel. God wants them to change their mind, right? He's pursuing them.

The people in Judah, as bad as some of their kings are, and as much as they've got their own problems, but the illustration is in the north. Turn ye at my reproof. Why will you die, O house of Israel? All day long I hold out my hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people.

Why? God wants them to turn. He wants us to turn. Now, I pointed out what I find to be a very striking symmetry, a very striking pattern.

Seven kings in northern Israel. Seven overt public double signs to northern Israel, all in the space of these few chapters. But let me ask you this.

What we've just seen, counting the kings, seven of them, seven being a significant number, seven public signs given to us in just a couple of chapters in 1 Kings, double signs. We see that pretty easily looking, I mean, at least once it's pointed out, we see it here in 1 Kings, right? Would the people in northern Israel have put this symmetry together? Would they have said, Wow, seven kings, seven signs, double signs at that? Is that the kind of thinking that would have gone on with your average Israelite up there in the land of Ephraim? No. We see it because it's laid out so beautifully in such an inspired fashion in the scripture.

What does that tell you? This beautiful symmetry, was it for them or is it for us? Who's really getting the emphatic presentation of these things? Who's getting the big mallet on the cranium here, them or us? How many times have I quoted, all of these things were written for our instruction? The symmetry and the beauty of it are here not for them. They're the content, they're like the sheep or the coin. We're the people at whom these things are now aimed.

What does God want from you? What does God want from me? We can say, Wow, isn't that cool? Seven kings, seven signs, double signs at that. We really need to look at the doubling of everything. You got a double prophet, you got a double... And believe me, that's just the beginning of the symmetry.

In fact, we're going to want to take a look at it. But my point here is to keep in mind, this account wasn't available to the people in the day. People to whom Elijah prophesied and Elisha prophesied didn't have this book.

These things are for you and for me. God wants to launch a celebration in heaven. God wants to

be joyful over sinners who have a change of mind.

Metanoeo, change your mind. I need to change my mind in some areas. My mind needs changing.

By mind, my thinking. My patterns of thought need to change. I need to break the cycle of sin in certain areas in my thinking.

And it may be very venerable. It may have been around a long time. It may have been there who knows how long, since I was a little kid.

It doesn't matter. It needs breaking. What breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free? Just what we're looking at here.

It is the Word of God and the Spirit of God. What brings the power of God into our lives? It's the Spirit and the Word. That's why we're here.

That's why you come. Every time we have Bible class, you're here. You're listening.

Why? Because you know how important it is for the power of God to come into your life. That's why you come. You're not here for celebrity.

You're not here for anything other than that which God gives us by His grace, which is deliverance. Deliverance from ourselves. We are not trapped.

We don't have to go sit on a couch with Dr. Phil. We don't have to buy a self-help book. We don't have to get a therapist.

We don't need somebody to affirm us and to hear our truth and to validate our feelings. We don't need to pay someone to make us the focus of our own attention and turn us into a giant me monster. We need the power of God.

It's the only thing that can actually hammer the rocks into pieces and burn the chaff and the trash out of our souls. It's the Word of God. This is the Word of God.

This pattern that we're looking at tonight, this reaching out from heaven of the hands of God to His people in the north who are abusively sinful, destructively corrupt, just like us. And God is reaching out His hands time after time, king after king, decade after decade. This is now the seventh decade in the northern kingdom.

It's been 60 years. You get into the reign of Ahab, and you're now in the seventh decade, the seventh king, the seventh sign. You're in the days of Elijah and then Elisha.

And it is God's final approach for these generations. And nothing before can match what Elijah does. So let's look at the reign of Ahab and the prophetic ministry of Elijah.

But keep in mind, we're not looking at it for them. We're looking at it for us. It's not now doing

them any good.

They are all dead and gone. The only way the ministry of Elijah and this pattern that God established does any good is in your heart and in my heart. It doesn't do anybody else any good.

These parties have been dead for centuries. You and I aren't dead yet. So we look at Elijah.

Now, just peruse, kind of like we did in Luke 15, look at just the chapter headings. You get into chapter 17 of 1 Kings. We don't have time to read this and go through it word by word, but you know these stories.

I don't see anybody here that doesn't know the stories of Elijah. God says, Elijah, proclaim a drought. And he does.

Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead. Gilead, when was the last time we heard about Gilead? What was going on in Gilead? There's a balm in Gilead that heals the sin-sick soul. What else is in Gilead? A little town called Jabesh.

Remember that? Remember Jehoshaphat, Ahab? What were they going to do? Take by force something that they ought to possess that's in Gilead. Jabesh Gilead, remember? But the Syrians have it. They lost it through disobedience.

Well, that's a whole other thing. But Elijah is from where? Gilead. Where is he now? He's now across the Jordan.

He's west of the Jordan. Doing a prophetic ministry. So Elijah, the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, and he's been in obscurity.

Nobody knows Elijah. He comes before Ahab. He's a man of God.

But now we have his name. He's not an unnamed man of God. He's a named man.

What does Elijah mean? You all know enough Hebrew to parse this out? Eliyah. What's El? God. Elohim.

Right? In the majestic plural. The plural of majesty and of overwhelming fullness. El.

Eli is what? What did Jesus cry from the cross? Eli, Eli. Lamah sabachthani. Remember that? My God.

Eli. My God is Yahweh, the Lord. My God is, and then there's God's personal name.

I am that I am. His covenant name. My God is the Lord God, covenant God of Israel.

The God of my fathers. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yahweh.

The God that delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt. Yahweh. My God is the Lord.

Elijah. As the Lord God of Israel lives. And this literally, we've heard this so many times.

At least I have. It just sounds like a formula. Another way of translating this is by the life of the Lord God.

People say, I swear on my life. I swear on the life of my child or my mother or whoever. People try to find something whereby to swear.

Jesus talked to the Pharisees about this. Swearing by the gold on the altar and swearing by the temple and this sort of thing. You try to invoke something bigger than yourself that's very valuable to affirm your sincerity.

And your commitment to a thing was the idea. On the life of the Lord God of Israel. Meaning he is a living God.

By the living God of Israel, he says to Ahab. There shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word. He delivers that prophecy and then he disappears.

God tells him, get away from here. Turn eastward and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. Brook Cherith.

Mahal means stream. Karoth means division. This is the stream of division.

Of separation. That's what Cherith means. Separation, division.

Go to that Brook. And if you've ever seen pictures of this thing, this is one of the wildest, most rugged ravines in all of Israel. It is one of the feeder ravines that the water flows through to become the Jordan.

It's like one of the sources of the Jordan. But it is a wildly rugged, deep, spectacularly impressive chasms. And that's where God sends Elijah.

It's going to be difficult to find him there. And down at the bottom of this chasm is a little bit of water. Because it has been raining and doing normal weather stuff up until the point that Elijah says there's not going to be any more.

So God says, go to the Brook. Go to the stream of division. The stream of separation, which flows into the Jordan.

And it will be that you shall drink from the Brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. So he went and did according to the word of the Lord. He went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

No accident that that's repeated. He has come across the Jordan to deliver this prophecy. He's from Gilead.

Now he is at a stream that feeds the Jordan. The Jordan is mentioned for a reason. What is it that Joshua and the people of Israel had to cross to come to the land of promise? The Jordan.

What is it that was miraculously divided and separated so that they could cross? The Jordan. One of the last supernatural signs that people in Israel saw until the days of the divided kingdom. The days of Joshua began with the parting of the Jordan and the supernatural deliverance of Jericho and the hail from heaven giving them victory in the southern campaign and so on.

Those were the days of God's supernatural intervention. And then those things quieted down until you get to the times of the judges. So the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, brought him bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

So in a day, Elijah gets three provisions. Two of them are supernatural and one is natural. He gets a supernatural breakfast.

These ravens, these birds, don't ordinarily even feed their young. You know how they've got the little robin coming in with an earthworm and the little cheeping babies that are cracked out of the eggs and the mother pokes a worm down each one and goes off. Ravens don't do that.

Little ravens are on their own. They've got to go find their own food. Ravens are very non-maternal.

They don't even feed their young. Little ravens have to just figure it out. But they feed Elijah.

It's miraculous. And, I mean, even if they did feed their young, Elijah doesn't look like a little cheeping thing that came out of an egg. So why would they fly all that way to this rugged place in the middle of nowhere and drop chow twice a day? Breakfast and supper.

Breakfast and supper. I haven't seen anybody say, you know, the Elijah diet plan, you know, wait for the birds to feed you and you'll lose weight. But this is supernatural by any account.

What's not supernatural? His water supply. He's drinking out of the stream. It's a stream.

Streams are supposed to have water. And the stream is slowly drying up because it's a natural source, and naturally in a drought, streams are going to dry up. And to this day, this thing will flow in the spring and then in the summer dries up, even when there's not a drought.

Supernatural food in the morning. Supernatural food in the evening. Natural water to sustain him all the rest of the time.

Until, in the course of nature, it dries up. Now, I could preach a whole sermon on God providing for us both by ordinary and extraordinary means. Sometimes our provision comes to us in the usual way.

You need a job. You apply. You send out resumes.

You get an interview. Word of mouth. Somebody says, hey, I know a guy that knows a guy that's looking for somebody like you.

By hook or by crook, you say, well, this happens for all kinds of people. You don't have to be a believer to have somebody recommend you or suggest you or point out an opportunity or you go and get an interview and they like you and they hire you. That happens to everybody.

It's natural. It's normal. My provision, I applied.

I was accepted. That's great. And then there are other times when you say there is no way anybody could have foreseen that this thing would happen, that provision would be made in this way.

I have known people personally and I have read innumerable accounts of people who felt a strong call to go to seminary but had no means to go and the obstacle was financial. And they open a letter in the mail from an address they don't recognize and here's a check for the exact amount they need to go to school. I know people for whom this has happened, and it's supernatural.

I don't know why, but I just felt led to send you some money, and here it is. Bank error in your favor. This has happened to me.

There are times when we were in desperate dire straits and we were this much short and out of nowhere the insurance company says, Oh, guess what? We've started this new thing where because you've been with us so long, we've set up this thing called a subscriber savings account and we're going to send you a dividend, and here it is, and it's the exact amount that we're short for that month. Of all of the times for it to arrive, it arrives exactly when we need it. It's exactly that amount we need, no more, no less.

God provides for us in both natural and supernatural ways. We are equally grateful. God also guides by provision.

When is it that Elijah leaves the brook of separation, the stream of division? When does he leave? He went and did according to the word of the Lord, verse 5, he stayed by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. What kinds of food, how many different kinds of food did Elijah have at the brook? How many different kinds of sustenance did he have? There's three, bread, meat, and water.

It's not just bread and water. He's not like a prisoner. He's got bread, meat, and water, three kinds.

Let me just point something out for you real quickly. For Elijah, there are three great public signs that we'll see next time. The first one is, he goes to Ahab, the king, in the royal court, and announces in front of everybody, there will be no rain except at my word.

That's a public sign from Elijah. Remember, he's already personally signed number seven to the northern kingdom, but when he shows up, he's going to give a three-fold public signage to northern Israel. The first one is, he proclaims the drought.

No rain or dew except at my word. The next time we see him in public, now some stuff happens with him personally, but the next time we see him publicly, it's in chapter 18, verse 20, and it's Mount Carmel. It's the prophets of Baal.

Big, public, splashy display. The third time is later on in chapter 18 when he says, I hear the sound of the abundance of rain. It's time for rain.

It's going to rain according to my word. It stopped raining when God pronounced it by the word of Elijah. He does the Mount Carmel thing in the middle, and then there's rain is the third big sign.

Those are his three great public affirmations to the northern kingdom, three of them. Elijah has three personal challenges. Things are going to be threes with Elijah.

He's at the brook. It's the widow with the cruise of oil and the barrel of meal, and it's the widow's son who dies. Those things happen in a corner.

It's just a widow off someplace, not widely known, not publicly known. This is Elijah. He's tested at the brook.

He's tested when he meets the widow, and the widow is tested when he says, give me to eat. Now, at the brook, now we already said he's got three public signs. He's got three personal tests, but each of these has three fold elements.

When he's at the brook, he gets three different kinds of, it's specifically mentioned, water, bread, and meat. When he goes to the widow, and she says, well, I've got two sticks. I'm going to make a fire and eat the last little dab of oil and meal, and then my son and I are going to die.

Elijah says, make me a cake and then make for you and your son. How many people eat in that second test for Elijah? Three. It's the widow, the son, and Elijah.

How many cakes is she supposed to make? Three. One for Elijah, one for her, one for her son. It's a three fold thing.

What's the third one? The son dies. The widow sends to him. Look at verse 21 of that chapter 18.

How many times does Elijah stretch himself out over the child? Three times. Is there a pattern here? By the way, how long does the land go without rain? Check out verse 43. Actually, check out 41, 1841.

Elijah said to Ahab, go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of the abundance of rain. This is

after three years. How many times does he tell a servant to go look for the cloud? Seven times.

That's verse 43. Seven times he said, go again, go look. Threes and sevens, threes and sevens, all the way through this northern kingdom ministry of the prophet Elijah.

By the way, Mount Carmel, if you look at that, watch for the threes. Watch for the sevens. How many times did Jesus tell a parable about God rejoicing and encouraging others to rejoice over sinners that repent? How many parables did he tell in Luke 15 with that point specifically? Three.

All these things are written for our instruction. If we want there to be celebration in heaven, if we want God to be pleased with us, if we care anything about pleasing our Heavenly Father. We all love people and we want to please them.

We want them to be happy with us and we want to be a blessing to them. If you want God to be happy with us, if we want to be pleasing in His sight, we want to look for those areas where we need to change our minds. God is reaching out.

He is leaning out of heaven seven-fold, three-fold. It's a perfect approach. It is full of God's grace.

It is the fullness and the perfection of God Himself calling us to repentance. It is up to us to not be hard-hearted, to not be one of the 99 that considers themselves just and not in need of repentance. Is there really nothing where we need improvement? Nothing where we need a change of mind? Nothing where we need to throw ourselves on God's grace and ask for God's power to change us, to make us better? Is there really nothing? Come on.

This is when God is pleased. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.

God holds out His hands to us. These things weren't available in these wonderful threes and sevens in Elijah's day, but they are available to us in that way. Why? Because it is a call to us to examine ourselves, to judge ourselves, to throw ourselves on the mercy of God, to claim His grace, exploit His promises and His provision, so that we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Our minds are changed. We let the power of God come in and change them and make us better than we started out. We don't need to be the northern kingdom.

We don't need to have idolatry. We don't need to be far from God. We don't need to be running in a destructive way, in a destructive course, and a curse to ourselves and others.

But it requires the power of God. God knows that. God makes it available to us.

He calls us to it in sections of His Word such as this. It's nowhere more clear and more powerful than here. We'll look at this and move from Elijah to Elisha, the second part of that seventh

great sign, next time.

But we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, we can't find the words to express how humbling it is and how grateful we are to see the lengths to which You have gone to rescue us, to restore us, to turn us into something useful and something beneficial and something that can reflect Your glory. Having started from such a dismal place, being hopeless and helpless and useless, lost, without You, enemies of Christ, enemies of ourselves, enemies of others, with no redeeming value at all.

And yet in this condition, Your Son, the Lord Jesus, came and died for us as a part of Your plan and purpose to redeem us, to reconcile us, to create in us a clean heart and to make us useful and beneficial now and in all of the future phases of Your plan and purpose. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will keep us mindful of these things, will work His convicting work, His instructing work in our hearts, using this powerful portion of Your Word to cut to the very center of our thoughts and intents and to enable us to be those living sacrifices, holy and acceptable in Your sight. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.