

Luke 15:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

Analysis

Jesus applies the parable: 'I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance' (λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὗτως χαρὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἔσται ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἀμαρτωλῷ μετανοοῦντι ἢ ἐπὶ ἐνευήκοντα ἐννέα δικαίοις οἵτινες οὐ χρείαν ἔχουσιν μετανοίας). The phrase 'joy in heaven' (χαρὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) reveals divine celebration over conversion. The comparison with 'ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance' contains irony—no such persons exist (Romans 3:23). The Pharisees considered themselves these ninety-nine, exposing their self-righteousness. True repentance (μετανοοῦντι, metanoouti, present participle) involves ongoing transformation, not one-time religious performance.

Historical Context

Jewish theology emphasized corporate election—being born into Abraham's covenant guaranteed salvation unless one apostatized. The Pharisees' opposition to Jesus stemmed partly from His undermining this presumption, insisting that individual repentance and faith were necessary. His emphasis on heaven's joy over one repentant sinner challenged their contempt for outcasts and their confidence in their own righteousness. The parable's shepherd leaving ninety-nine for one would seem economically foolish but reveals God's radical commitment to seeking the lost.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that all people need repentance (there are no genuinely righteous apart from grace) transform your view of evangelism?
2. What does heaven's celebration over repentance teach about God's priorities versus human religious priorities?

Interlinear Text

εἰς	ἐαυτὸν	δὲ	ἐλθὼν	εἶπεν	Πόσοι	μίσθιοι	τοῦ	
to	himself	And	when he came	he said	How many	hired servants		G3588
G1519	G1438	G1161	G2064	G2036	G4214	G3407		
πατρός	μον	περισσεύουσιν	ἄρτων	ἐγὼ	δὲ	λιμῷ		
father's	of my	enough and to spare	have bread	I	And	with hunger		
G3962	G3450	G4052	G740	G1473	G1161	G3042		
ἀπόλλυμαι								
perish								
G622								

ἀπόλλυμαι
perish
G622

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 18:28 (Parallel theme): Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Ephesians 5:14 (Parallel theme): Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Jeremiah 31:19 (Parallel theme): Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

Acts 2:37 (Parallel theme): Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Psalms 73:20 (Parallel theme): As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

Ecclesiastes 9:3 (Parallel theme): This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Luke 8:35 (Parallel theme): Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

Luke 16:23 (Parallel theme): And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

Lamentations 1:7 (Parallel theme): Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths.