

## What Matters Most to God Luke 15:1-10

Last week we began a brief journey into the heart of God. This is vitally important because your understanding of God, who He is, what is He like, how He relates to you, has a profound impact on your relationship with Him. Over the years I have talked with hundreds of people about their relationship with God and I have asked them to share with me their understanding of who God is and then share some descriptive words about you see God interacting with the world. Those who have a close relationship with Him describe God as being full of love, compassionate, caring, reachable, involved, joyous, strong, peaceful, and protective.

Those who used terms like; distant, uncaring, indifferent, mysterious, vengeful, and judgmental, found Him to be that same way in their own life. As a result, their relationship with God was one of being distant, cold, fearful, or non-existent.

Jesus, being the Son of God, knew the Jewish people had been getting a distorted image of God. Through the emphasis on the Law by the leaders in the synagogues, the Pharisees, the Jewish people did not have an intimate relationship with God. They did not see Him as being personal and that it was a very works oriented relationship. Also, the Jewish people could only access God through the priest so their own personal relationship with God was non-existent.

Jesus knew that it was crucial for humanity to gain a true understanding of what His heart is like, and the perception of God as being anything but up close and personal had to change.

That is one of the reasons why Jesus gave us the parables, this collection of short stories. Each parable, each story is a window into

God's heart. God wants us to understand His true nature, His real character, and by doing so, He wants us to enter into an intimate, loving relationship with Him.

Last week we learned three very simple, but profound words about the basic nature of God. Those three words are; God is love. God's love for you and me and His desire for us to have a deep, personal relationship with Him, is a theme that runs throughout the scripture. That is why God is the main character in each parable and each parable will focus on the heart of the main character. God wants us to know His heart. With this understanding in mind I now invite you to join with me as we read two parables, both giving us a deeper understanding of what God is really like.

READ LUKE 15:1-10

As one begins reading and studying the scripture that person will quickly discover that God is on an all-out search for three kinds of people. He is on constant search mode and He has an APB out for these three kinds of people. One type of person He is searching for is an "inside insider."

An inside insider is a person whose heart is fully committed to Him and He or she is inside the family of God and is a fully functioning member of the family. Let me give you one of the many verses of scripture that speaks to this APB He has on this person. This one happens to come from the Old Testament and is one of my favorite.

*"The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen the hearts of those who are fully committed to Him" (1 Chronicles 16:9)* They are people who are not straddling the spiritual fence with one foot in God's kingdom and one foot in self-centeredness, focused on what the world can give them. On Sunday they are not one way and on Monday morning they have their sights on something else living with a different

set of priorities. They are inside-insiders. They are fully committed to Jesus Christ.

- The fully committed know and experience the deep love God has for them and for everyone. The fully committed are in connection with God. A close relationship has been established. Love is flowing back and forth. Conversation is going on. Complete trust in God is happening. The reason God created us is being fulfilled and that is for us to fellowship with Him and Him with us. And it is out of that connection that all of these other great things happen.
- The fully committed reach out to the lost.
- The fully committed serve many hours in the church for one main reason; to create and maintain a place where the lost can come and be found.
- The fully committed pray diligently for family and friends who are not inside-insiders asking God to bring them into an intimate relationship with Him.
- The fully committed give generously and with joy in their hearts to the work of the church knowing that it is through their giving that ministries are funded, ministries that reach people who are lost and needing to be loved.

I think you get the picture. Inside- insiders are people who love God completely and as a result, God uses them to accomplish what He wants to accomplish and that is to love people to His heart and will do whatever it takes through them to bring the message of His love to humanity.

This leads me to the second group of people that matters most to God and He has an APB out for these people as well. They are not of any less value than the inside-insiders and He loves them the same. This second group is what I have heard referred to as the inside- outsiders. To understand this group you have to look at the audience that was there when Jesus gave this parable. Some of the Jewish leaders in the

synagogue were whispering among themselves about how Jesus eats with those who are sinners and literally hangs out with them. My guess is that their muttering and whispering was meant to be heard as Jesus, in response to what He was saying, gave His audience three parables, back to back, without explanation between them as He normally would do. He is wanting us to see God's heart and He gives three parables in quick succession; the first two we are looking at today and next week we are going to focus on the third.

There are people today who are inside-outsiders. Jesus saw the Jewish leaders as inside-outsiders. They were in the church. They knew the Old Testament backwards and forwards. They were heavy into religious customs and rituals. They focused on performance. They were all about the numbers; the attendance, the offering, the budget, and they made sure everything was perfect. In fact, it was all about being perfect on the outside. Yet it was the inside that was lost. In many ways the inside-outsider is much like the outside-outsider which makes up the third group that is dear to God's heart. The outside outsider is one who is outside the church and is lost, just like the inside-outsider is lost. Both groups are lost because neither of the two has experienced the transforming power of God's love in their lives. The point is that they are both lost and God loves them and cares for them. He wants everyone to be on the inside of His love and for anyone to be in a close, intimate relationship with Him. He is constantly looking, searching for anyone whose heart is wanting to come to Him and commit themselves fully and completely to Him.

That is the major point of these two parables. The deep concern Jesus had for the inside-outsider is that this person thought because of his religiosity that he was on the inside but he wasn't. He or she is lost, just like the outside-outsider is lost. He gave away the fact of his being lost the moment he pointed out how Jesus ate dinner with and socialized with the outside-outsiders. He was demonstrating that He didn't know

that God loved the whole world, that each person was and is just as important as the next person, regardless if he or she is an inside-insider, inside-outsider, or outside-outsider. God's heart is full of love each and every person. Today He is looking right into your heart. He knows what group you are in and He knows where He wants you to be. He is calling out to you. He wants you to come home to His heart of love, of forgiveness, and of strength.