

"Heaven Rejoices"

Have you ever thought about a celebration in heaven? Yes, God our Father and the angels rejoice! Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." When do they rejoice? Stay with us and we'll find out!

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The God of the Bible is the God of salvation and eternal life. He's the God who loves every person and wants what is best for us all. He's the God of peace, the God of mercy, and the God of forgiveness, and the God of all comfort. He's also the God of joy, and we can rejoice in Him! God is love, and the God of love rejoices in what is good and right. Love "doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13 verse 6). Loving and obeying the truth will bring us joy. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

One thing I know about God: He cares for every person who is lost and wants that person to be forgiven. 1 Timothy 2, verses 3 to 4 says, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Some think of God as waiting for us to sin, so He can send us to hell; but God takes no pleasure in sending anyone to hell. He sent Jesus to reveal His love, which can bring about tremendous life, those changes that are inside of us that cause us to become new creatures in Christ. And God rejoices in our newness of life.

God's joy is not like the passing pleasures of happiness in this life. It's everlasting and full. Psalm 16:11 says, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever." True, abundant life comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our hope and our joy forever!

We offer this study free on why heaven rejoices. If you'd like a printed copy of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Luke 15:4 to 7, and explore what causes the God of heaven and the angels to rejoice.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 15, verses 4 through 7. So He told them this parable saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Yes, God loves and rejoices over those who repent.

Let's pray together. "Oh Father we're thankful for the gift of repentance, and Father we're thankful that we can change our hearts and change our lives. Give us strength to do so, that we may follow Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen."

Many in our society don't like to talk about sin, hell, or the need for repentance. No one likes to hear something that they're doing is wrong. People don't like it when you disagree with them about what they think or believe. Some even believe it's cruel to ask them to repent. That was true in the days of the Lord Jesus, and it's true today! Frankly, many people do not realize that God sees repentance differently than we do.

The Pharisees of the first century were arrogant and thought they were better than others. They did everything they could to resist the common people and sinners of that day. Luke 15, verses 1 and 2 records their actions: "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" They believed if Jesus were truly a prophet, he wouldn't eat with sinners. They knew their traditions, but they didn't know the heart of God. God loves every person and wishes to bring them home to heaven. 1 Timothy 2, verses 3 to 4 says as we mentioned, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Now this is why God rejoices over every sinner that repents. Now just like the shepherd who searches till he finds his lost sheep, the Lord Jesus says in Luke 15 verse 7, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Just like the woman who searches until she finds a lost coin, so the Lord Jesus says in Luke 15:10, "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The Lord Jesus tells the heart of a father whose son finally returns penitently after going to a far country and living in sin. Luke 15:22 to 24 says, "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate." You know people who live in sin are spiritually dead and separated from God, but those who penitently return to God can have spiritual life once again!

Let's examine the reasons that God rejoices. First, God desires more than your salvation by love, faith, and obedience; He desires that you repent and change your heart and your ways. God wants you to be born again with a new heart that wants righteousness rather than rebellion, purity rather than impurity, and holiness rather than worldliness. He wants you to be converted from a person who follows after sin into a person who follows the Lord Jesus in purity and holiness. When a people place their faith in Christ, repent of their sins and are baptized into Christ, they're born again in Christ. That begins a new life of devotion to the Lord. Faith, love, and a changed heart and life continue as long as we live.

Second, God rejoices because He puts extreme value on your soul. Your soul is not worthless. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Your soul is worth much, much more than you may imagine.

1 Peter 1:18 and verse 19 says "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as the lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

Third, God rejoices that you've left a life that is sad, empty, and has no promise. Life apart from God is vain and futile. God wants something better for you than a sinful life. Eph. 4:17-19 says, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that's in them, because of the hardness of their heart, and they have become callous, having given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity, with greediness." Now, this idea of being ungodly, means that God has no place in your heart or life. You don't know Him, and you don't care. Ungodly people don't take God seriously, so they fill their hearts and their

lives with godless and wicked ways. You have no future with God but a future with darkness if you're ungodly. And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I see people who do evil things, speak the most unwholesome words, treat others disrespectfully, and live ungodly lives yet still have a necklace with a cross or a cross tattoo on their arms. Well this confuses everyone about righteousness. It's as if Jesus Christ means nothing to the way they live. They can live as they please and yet still be considered all right with Christ. This, however, is a fantasy. You can't live for the world and live for Christ at the same time. To do so is spiritual adultery. You can't be attached to God and have a worldly life on the side. James 4 and verse 4 says to those who want both, "You adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? And therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Now making an enemy of God is the worst thing that you can do.

Fourth, repentance takes God seriously and hungers for righteousness. We die to the desire for sin when we repent. We convert our hearts and convert our lives. When we recognize the harsh conditions that our sins have made against God and how they've caused that, we begin to open our eyes. You see, sin causes guilt and shame in our hearts. And sin can quickly cause us to be enslaved to habits that destroy our lives. Sin can hurt other people that destroy our relationship with God. As Isaiah 59:1 and 2 says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short, That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." You see, sin causes spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

Now repentance moves a person to choose to leave everything that's evil and to do what is right and good. A penitent person stops making excuses and trying to justify his sinful behavior. He'll be honest with himself. Psalm 51 and verse 6 reminds us that God desires truth in the innermost being. Now God knows when you have sinned, but He wants you to be honest and acknowledge it.

Some in our culture refuse to admit anything is sinful. They don't realize the harm and confusion they're causing by claiming something that God condemns isn't immoral. Nothing could be more harmful or oppressing than to relabel sinful behavior as okay. Do you really think relabeling sin changes God's mind or His will. We're not the first to try that; oh, it didn't work before and it won't work now! Isaiah 5, verses 20 to 21 says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And clever in their own sight!"

Our culture has confused the hearts of many. They have often used the word "love" to justify whatever they want to do. Love, however, can't turn a lie into the truth. Love can't justify sin. David's love for Bathsheba didn't justify his adultery or killing Uriah. Love doesn't justify fornication in any form. Love doesn't justify pedophilia or same-sex activity. Again, 1 Corinthians 13 verse 6 says love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." God rejoices and wants us to rejoice when we are righteous, but God doesn't rejoice over sinful behavior. Someone says, "Well God wants me to be happy." Yes, He does; but God's happiness comes to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and those who are pure in heart. He doesn't bless those who take pleasure in sin.

Someone objects, "Well, God is not about judging people." Well that view of God is popular but misrepresents God. God is love, but God is also light holy, and He's light that is pure. He will not accept those who walk in sin or darkness (1 John 1 and verse 6). Sadly, people lie to themselves when they think they can live in sin and still have fellowship with God. The Lord Jesus said that His words, the things that He's taught, will judge us on the last day (John 12 and verse 48). 2 Corinthians 5 and verse

10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." Though some think we should never judge anything, the Lord Jesus said in John 7:24, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." Loving others means telling them the truth. The truth is kinder than a lie that causes them to turn from God.

Repentance means that you'll put to death the sin in your life rather than excuse it. Romans 6:11 to 13 says, "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Christians should avoid those things that are evil. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals." They don't want to return to the sin that they left when they repent. 2 Timothy 2 and verse 22 says, "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

Fifth, repentance opens the door for change and obedience, which leads to salvation and eternal life. God sees our hearts; He sees our repentance and willingness to obey. When we obey, God's grace becomes deeper, richer, and fuller to us. We begin to understand more fully how deep and wonderful is the love and grace of God. Repentance means we want nothing more to do with sin and everything to do with God. The bitterness that came from recognizing we were lost is replaced with grace and joy for the penitent believer who obeys.

We'll never know how sweet and marvelous God's love is until we understand how repugnant and offensive our sins against Him are. The Lord Jesus out of love paid a great price in suffering and dying upon a cruel cross, so that we could be freed from the guilt of sin. He wouldn't have done so if the sin were not a real danger to our souls. His love protected us from the wrath of God and against sin. His atoning sacrifice allowed us to stop being strangers to God and start being His children. We don't have to fear and dread the Judgment, if we're cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. We can have confidence in His love and forgiveness. That confidence will move us to love Him and find the joy of obedience and forgiveness.

Some people think the command to repent is like the old practice of penance, where people punished themselves for their sins. Repentance, however, corrects us and brings healing to our souls, our lives, and our consciences. Though God's grace forgives, God expects us to change our hearts and ways. And when grace and repentance work together they bring great healing to our broken lives. We become new people who can stand right with God and have a good conscience. We have no greater joy than knowing we have God's blessing and favor. Are you right with God?

Let's pray. Oh Father help us to turn from the evil and turn to the good, to love You and to serve You always. In Jesus name, Amen."

The prophet Micah knew the value of a heart devoted to God. God wants our hearts to serve Him all our days. Micah 6:6 to 8 says, "With what shall I come to the LORD, And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you, But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?"

God washes away our sins when we're baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16), but a baptism without faith or without repentance will not wash away sins. The New Testament has no record of unbelievers

being baptized or the impenitent being immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins. The New Testament gives no teaching or example of an infant being baptized, since infants neither believe nor have a reason to repent. The people on Pentecost had a need to repent and were told in Acts 2:38 to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Perhaps you have a need to repent. Won't you repent and be baptized today for the forgiveness of your sins?

Perhaps you were baptized for forgiveness many years ago but have fallen away from the Lord and stopped worshiping at church. You may have allowed sinful thoughts and behaviors to lead you away from God. Why not consider your soul and those whom you love? Come home, penitent, confess your sins, and ask God's forgiveness.

Well, we hope that today's study about what we are to do to serve the Lord has stirred you consider your soul. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area. Now you can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Why not subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry" and hit that 'thumbs up' button! We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

Focus your heart on God by worshiping at church today. And as always, we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.