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St. Luke 15:1-7; I Timothy 1:13-16:

## **“It Was, Is, And Will Be the Business of God”**

- I. The Grumblers.
- II. The One Who Goes After.
- III. Always His Business.

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St. Luke 15:1-7; I Timothy 1:13-16

Dear Friends in Christ,

Will Durant was a writer and historian. He died in 1981. He's probably best known for his 11 volume work The Story of History. Durant stated: "Caesar hoped to reform men by changing institutions and laws; Christ wished to remake institutions and lessen laws by changing men." He missed the point, as most do. Christ came to address death and eternal life. Institutions will come and go and then end on the Last Day.

As I thought about this sermon I was drawn to what the angel said to Joseph concerning Mary's pregnancy: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). That is the purpose and goal of Jesus. "Sin" is a nasty word for many. Sinful human nature always twists its meaning to comply with its nature. For most, the only sin is calling sin, sin.

It's scary, isn't it, where we've come in our thinking and where it's taking us? Years ago, Billy Graham said, "We are dangerously near to saying to the prodigal son, 'It is not necessary to return to our father and home - we can make you comfortable in the pigpen.'" We're no longer "dangerously near." We're in it!

It's a scary world, isn't it? Amid the growing absurdities in thinking, saying, and doing, and while we still have some freedom, though fading, let's consider . . .

## IT WAS, IS, AND WILL BE THE BUSINESS OF GOD

### I. The Grumblers.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them' (1,2).

So why the distinction between tax collectors and sinners? First, tax collectors were the worst because they were Jews serving the Roman Government; they were seen as traitors. Second, they were dishonest in their dealings with the people.

But did you catch the verb *grumbled*, as in "And the Pharisees and scribes grumbled...?" They made a low, growling sound; complained. Have we ever grumbled about God? Complained because He (God in the flesh) wasn't doing what we thought He should do? That's what the Pharisees we're doing. We caught the words: "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (v.2b). It should have been, "Thank God!"

You might recall the story from years ago about the Sunday School teacher who taught a wonderful lesson on heaven. Toward the end of the class period, she asked the question, "Who wants to go to Heaven?" Everyone enthusiastically raised their hands except one boy. The teacher asked him, "Why don't you want to go to heaven?" The boy answered, "I really do, but not with this crowd!"

I'm sure we can appreciate the boy's remark because on this side of heaven "this crowd" is far from perfect. Well, an honest look at ourselves can be most revealing. There is no place for self-righteousness, especially when standing in the bright light of God's Word: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I Jn. 1:8). "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I Jn. 1:10). And, more than likely, some of those sins have torn into the heart!

### II. The One Who Goes After.

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that 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 that was lost" (vv.3-6).

We've all probably lost something of great importance and intensely searched for it. And if we found it, we were overjoyed. But there is no greater joy than when the Lord rescues the eternally lost; when He rescued us. And that brings us to the mercy and love of God for sinners, and the Apostle Paul is the example. In the Epistle lesson, Paul writes, "though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent (not only of the beginning Christian church, but an opponent of God)...(I Tim 1:13a). Do we understand the intensity of what Paul was saying? He was a leading persecutor of the beginning New Testament church. In the Book of Acts we are given these words of Paul: "I persecuted this Way (the name given to the beginning church) to the death, bringing and delivering to prison both men and women..." (Acts 22:4).

But look, Paul then states, "But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord (His undeserved love) overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Jesus Christ" (I Tim. 1:13b,14). It's the love of God that suffered hell and death that we might have eternal life. Again, that love is Jesus. It is this love that assures us, "While we were still sinners...while we were enemies...Christ died for us" (Rm.5:8). As far as how this world reacts to Christ, which is often very negative, the Lord assures us through Zechariah, "for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zech.2:8b).

Until the Last Day, **It was, is, and will be the business of God to go after** the lost and reach into their lives with His love and mercy through Jesus Christ. And those He has rescued are the instruments he uses to go after others. As Paul writes:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life (I Tim. 1:15-16).

What Jesus said in our Gospel lesson is Heaven's reaction to what happened when you - each of you - and me were brought to faith in Christ: "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk. 15:17). And all do!

### III. Always His Business.

I wonder if any of you recall the account of Tommy Pigage. Tommy began drinking at age 16. As a result, he developed a drinking problem. The article I read some years ago stated:

On December 23, 1982, after drinking too much, he refused to let anyone drive him home. He was less than one mile from his home when his car strayed across the center line and struck an oncoming car instantly killing the driver. Tommy was arrested for murder. His blood alcohol level registered almost three times the amount required to be legally intoxicated.... Tommy was given a 10 year sentence. Five of those years were suspended and the remaining five were probated...Among other stipulations, he was required to participate in *Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)* programs at area high schools for a period of five years."

It was a year or so after Tommy's parole that a couple, Frank and Elizabeth Morris, befriended him. They drove him to church every week. He joined the church, and was often a dinner guest at the Morris' home. In fact, the change for Tommy Pigage was so dramatic that he became an active lecturer for "Mothers Against Drunk Driving (*MADD*)."

The article I read also stated that the first time he spoke

on behalf of MADD, "He referred to himself as 'a murderer' and even said he thought his sentence was too light, adding, I should be in prison." (Written by William Plummer, reported by Cable Neuhaus) Now, maybe you're wondering, "So, what's the point?" Well, the 18-year-old man killed in the head-on collision by Tommy Pigage was the only son of Frank and Elizabeth Morris.

After the first time I read this account, I found myself staring at the wall; thinking about the love and mercy of God that gave His only Son for us. I thought about the words, "For while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rm.5:10). God loves us in spite of our sin, which I also call "crimes," against Him! We understand what Scriptures say, "The wages of sin (one or a trillion, trillion) is death" (Rm 6:23a). But He still loves us. He still forgives us and gives us the gift of eternal life for Jesus' sake. He washed away our sin and befriended us in the water of Baptism. He invites us to Supper every week that feeds us pardon and peace.

We know what this world thinks of Jesus. The disgusting part is what much of the contemporary church thinks of Jesus. We know that much of the church is more interested in good times, being appealing, and numbers; will alter or eliminate whatever Scripture that offends the flesh. We know the church is becoming less important in a world that worships SELF. But I know something else, and so do you. Just like Tommy Pigage we've got something to say. But what we have to say has eternal significance. In fact, ***it was, is, and will be the business of God***: forgiveness of sin and eternal life in Jesus. It's our business to witness to it.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott