

“3 Things Needed for Reaching the Lost”

October 25, 2015

Luke 15:1-10

I. Introduction

In these two parables something of value is lost, and the thing lost, whether a sheep or a coin, has monetary value. Nobody, including the religious leaders who valued material things, would ignore such a loss; rather they would make every effort to find it and would rejoice when they did.

If this is true about things that are lost, shouldn't it also be true for people who are spiritually lost? The term "*lost*" refers to those who are not Christians, to those who are outside of the household of God. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Lost Son in [Luke 15:11-32](#), the father says about the son who repented and returned home in [verse 32](#) “He was lost and is found.” God desires all to come to Him, as we have seen in [2 Peter 3:9](#), “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” [John 3:16](#) says that Jesus came to die on the cross because “God so loved the world.”

One of the points of these two parables is to remind Christians of how they should respond to the lost. These parables also illustrate how God responds and searches for the lost. Either way, the message remains the same, because if God responds a certain way to those who are lost then it is obvious that Christians should follow His example. [Not just missionaries but individual Christians wherever we are.](#) This morning I'd like to look at these verses where we find three things needed in order to reach the lost. The first thing needed is found in the setting of the parables; the other two things that are needed are found in the parables themselves. The first thing needed is . . .

II. Three Things Needed for Reaching the Lost

A. Compassion [Verses 1 & 2](#) say, “Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” Jesus had the “tax collectors and sinners” gathering around him. These lost people weren't running away from Jesus but rather running to Him. They weren't avoiding him, ignoring him, or even hostile towards him. They were “gathering around to hear him.” Why were sinners so willing and even eager to listen to Jesus? It certainly wasn't because Jesus had an easy message that tickled people's ears. It wasn't because Jesus compromised on sin and said that everything they were doing was acceptable. They weren't gathering around Jesus because He was putting on some

marvelous show of signs and wonders. Actually, at this point in the Gospel of Luke, the emphasis is on Jesus' teaching—miracles are hardly even mentioned.

So why did the “lost” seek out Jesus rather than run from him? The answer is His compassion. Jesus loved them and showed that love with a compassionate attitude instead of a condemning one. Even the Pharisees recognized that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them.” One of the definitions for the Greek word translated as “welcomes” in this verse is to “receive as a friend.” This was Jesus' attitude toward those who were lost in sin. Jesus welcomed them; He was compassionate and accepting of them despite their sins and faults. He was a friend and not a foe. Jesus had an attitude that lost people were attracted to, do we? For us as individuals and as a church to reach people, we are going to have to show the same love and acceptance that Jesus had. The first thing needed for reaching the lost is compassion.

Have you ever noticed that at the scene of an accident or a shooting, there are three groups of people, each with a different response toward those involved in the accident or shooting? The first group is the bystanders and onlookers. They are curious and watch to see what happens but have little active involvement. The second group is the police officers. Their response is to investigate the cause of the accident, assign blame, and give out appropriate warnings and punishments. The third group is the paramedics. They are the people usually most welcomed by those involved in the accident. They could care less whose fault the accident was and they don't lecture about bad driving habits or the proper use of guns. Their response is to help those who are hurt. They bandage wounds, free trapped people, and give words of encouragement. Three groups - one is uninvolved, one is the condemning—assigning blame and assessing punishment, and one is the compassionate—helping the hurting. Which group are you in?

When it comes to reaching the lost and hurting, we're going to be in one of these three groups. We will be uninvolved and let others do the work. Or we will condemn people for their foolish behavior saying things like, “*It's your own fault that you're in this mess. If you had been going to church and doing like you should this never would have happened!*” Or we will be concentrating on helping those who are lost and hurting—showing compassion to those in need.

Sadly, many Christians respond to the lost like police officers instead of the paramedics. This is what the Pharisees and teachers of the law did. They were more interested in condemning and criticizing sinners than in showing compassion. The same attitude is sometimes seen in the church. We're rightfully upset about the current state of moral values, abortion, the homosexual agenda, and

the immoral entertainment in society today, among other things. It is fine and appropriate to be concerned about these issues, but we must be careful that our concern about these issues does not turn into condemnation toward the lost. *We need to hate the sin **BUT** love the sinner.* The lost have never flocked to hear those who were condemning and they never will listen to us if we have that same attitude. The first thing needed for reaching the lost is compassion.

There are several lessons in these two parables. Along with an illustration of the joyous attitude the Pharisees should have had to the lost coming to Jesus, we see two more things needed to reach the lost. The second thing needed for reaching the lost is effort.

B. Effort In these two parables, Jesus emphasized the effort that went into finding the missing item—the lost. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus said that the shepherd would “*leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep.*” In the parable of the lost coin, the woman “*lights a lamp, sweeps the house and searches carefully.*”

In both cases, the thing that was lost had to be sought after with great effort. The shepherd did not wait for the lost sheep to wander home and the woman did not wait for the lost coin to turn up. In our Christian lives and in the church, it sometimes seems that we do the opposite. We tend to wait for the lost to come to us. We’re passive rather than active. We’re waiting for people to come to Christ instead of putting effort into bringing them to Christ!

What do we need to do in order to be following Jesus’ instructions about giving effort to reaching the lost? There are several things we can do. First, we need to pray for the lost—by name, if possible. Second, “*making every effort to reach the lost*” means we must be willing to make outreach, like OCC and ECFA, a significant part of our personal and church spending—both in our funds but also in our time and talents. It is important that the church make every effort to reach the lost through outreaches and supporting missionaries who can go where we can’t, **BUT** the most important thing you and I, as individuals, need to do in reaching the lost is to do our best to share Jesus with all those we come into contact with. The second thing needed for reaching the lost is effort. Finally, the third thing needed to reach the lost is persistence.

C. Persistence In both these cases, in *verses 4 & 8*, Jesus said that the person continued seeking after the lost item until he or she found it. In other words, Jesus was pointing out that persistence is a needed quality for success. After all, lost sheep out in the hills and valleys, and lost coins in the dirt floor of the Jewish home would not have been easily or quickly found.

It's the same way with reaching the lost. It is not easy to reach people's hearts so that they receive Jesus. It is not usually the case that our first effort meets with success. Sometimes it takes years and years of persistence, but we should not be discouraged or give up. If a sheep or coin was valuable enough to persistently search for, then people who are spiritually lost are too valuable to give up on. The third thing needed to reach the lost for Jesus Christ is persistence.

III. Conclusion

Jesus closed these parables by pointing out that the one thing that matters most to God is the lost. They matter so much to God that when the lost are found, even one of them, all heaven rejoices and throws a party! There is more joy over one sinner coming to Jesus than ninety-nine people being right where they're supposed to be with God.

If lost people matter this much to God, shouldn't they matter this much to us? Shouldn't we respond to people who are lost in the same way or even a greater way than we would to lost things? Shouldn't we exert the same efforts, and perseverance in searching for them? Shouldn't we be filled with joy at their being found? Shouldn't we be willing to give everything needed in order to reach the lost? Let me close with some familiar words from [Matthew 28:18-21](#), “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”