

“Lost and Found”

November 1, 2020

Luke 15:1-10

I. Introduction

Just before He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus said in **Luke 19:10**, **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”** As a group, the Jewish religious leaders, i.e., the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the teachers of the law, never accepted that this meant them as well as **“tax collectors and sinners.”** But Jesus was compassionate and patient with them far more than we would have been. Over and over He tried to break down the walls they had put around their self-righteous hearts.

At a banquet where they tried to entrap Jesus, they had listened to Him teach about humility, the resurrection of the righteous, and a great banquet where all were invited. Then, along with the large crowd that followed Him, they had heard Jesus teach about the cost of being one of His disciples. But they just couldn't comprehend (I suspect that they didn't want to understand) what He meant when in **Luke 14:33** He summarized those teachings: **“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”** Like the rich, young ruler who came to Jesus in **Luke 18:18-25** and asked, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life,”** they were unable to give up their self-righteousness and follow Him. The sad part is that they didn't want this message of salvation to go to anyone else either. It was this attitude that led to the confrontation and parables in today's Scripture.

II. The Scene

The scene opened with **“tax collectors and sinners all gathering around to hear”** Jesus. **“Tax collectors”** were Jews who were employed to collect taxes for the Roman government; many weren't above adding to the official taxes to line their own pockets as well. Because of all this, they were considered to be traitors, outcasts, even robbers. Their disgrace extended to their families as well. **“Sinners”** were evil people, this would include tax collectors, adulterers, and robbers, as well as those who

refused to follow the Mosaic law as interpreted by the teachers of the law. That Jesus would associate with and reach out to such despised outcasts—to sinners—shocked and appalled the religious authorities.

The Pharisees called people who did not keep the law as interpreted by them *the People of the Land*. There was a complete barrier between the Pharisees and these “People of the Land.” A Pharisee was forbidden to be the guest of any such man or to have him as his guest. He was even forbidden, as far as it was possible, to have any business dealings with him. Rather than saying, as Jesus, did that “**There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents,**” they said, “*There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God.*” They looked sadistically forward not to the saving but to the destruction of every sinner.

It was because of this attitude that Jesus gave three parables that demonstrate that God and all heaven rejoice when the lost are found. (We’ll look at the third parable next Sunday.) Contrary to the Pharisees’ viewpoint, Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:9**, “**The Lord ... is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**” Although they claimed to know God, they actually knew nothing at all about Him. They didn’t really know God—**Isaiah 29:13** would seem to describe them, “**The Lord said, ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.’**”

III. Two Parables

A. Parable #1: A Lost Sheep The 1st parable was about a shepherd and a lost sheep. Shepherds were near the bottom of the social ladder. They were uneducated and unskilled. They were viewed as dishonest and unreliable; they were not even permitted to testify in court. Since sheep had to be watched and cared for 7 days a week, shepherds were unable to follow the Pharisees’ man-made Sabbath regulations. For this reason, they were considered to be ceremonially unclean. For Jesus to ask the teachers of the law and the Pharisees to imagine themselves in the role of a shepherd was insulting. No

Pharisee would lower himself to become a shepherd—not even hypothetically. By challenging them to put themselves in the imaginary shepherd’s place, Jesus was once again attacking their immense pride.

As the story opened, one of the sheep is missing. This was a serious situation which called for immediate action. Shepherds were accountable for their flock. If one was missing, according to the Law in [Exodus 22:10-13](#), the shepherd had to pay for it unless he could prove it was killed by a predator or stolen. It was the shepherd’s duty to **“to leave the ninety-nine in the open country,”** most likely under the care of others, **“and go after the lost sheep until he”** found it. Not to find the lost sheep meant money out of his own pocket, plus the disgrace of being known as a careless shepherd. By leaving the 99 sheep, the shepherd was not saying that they were unimportant to him. They were safe under the care of others, but the lost sheep was in danger. The fact that the shepherd would go after one lost sheep was proof that each animal was dear to him.

In Jesus’ parable the shepherd was successful—he found the lost sheep. Having found it, the shepherd **“joyfully put it on his shoulders”** and returned home carrying the heavy animal—an adult sheep can weigh more than 100 pounds. After being lost, sought, and found, the sheep’s safe return was celebrated. In his joy over finding the missing sheep, the shepherd called **“his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’”** Since they were **“lovers of money”** ([Luke 16:14](#)), the Pharisees would have understood the celebration. They would have agreed that the shepherd’s diligent search for the lost sheep was his obligation.

Having drawn the Pharisees and teachers of the law into the story, Jesus then delivered the scorching application: **“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”** The contrast between the Pharisees and teachers who couldn’t care less about the lost and God, represented by the shepherd, who seeks the lost and rejoices when they are found, was obvious. Those who claimed to be God’s representatives did not even understand God’s mission or share God’s joy. Their thinking was

alien to God's thinking. They were hypocritical, false shepherds who knew nothing of the compassionate, caring, loving heart of God. They were represented by the 99 self-righteous persons who do not see a need to repent and who bring no joy to heaven.

B. Parable #2: A Lost Coin Jesus' 2nd parable was about a woman and a lost coin—a coin equal to a day's wage. When a Jewish girl married, she began to wear a headband of ten silver coins to signify that she was a wife. It represented her dowry, given to her as a wedding present by her father. It provided security for the future. It was the Jewish version of our modern wedding ring, and it would be considered a disaster for her to lose one of the coins. Since Palestinian houses usually had either no windows, or at best very small ones, for her to carry out her desperate search, it was necessary for her to **"light a lamp."** When a quick look didn't reveal the coin, she **"sweep the house,"** a dusty, hard-packed dirt floor **"and searched carefully until she finds it."**

Like the shepherd, the woman shared her joy after finding the coin: **"she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'"** People in a small, tight-knit village would share each other's sufferings and joys, so a party celebrating the woman's joy at recovering what she had lost would have been appropriate. Are eternal souls worth less?

Once again, the Pharisees would have had to agree that, under the circumstances, what the woman had done was necessary. All would have agreed that having lost a significant amount of money, there was nothing else for her to do but to diligently search for it until she found it. The joyful celebration would have been understood. But then, applying the story to them, Jesus said, **"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."** Once again Jesus contrasted the Pharisees' contempt for the souls of others with God's passionate concern for them.

In both stories Jesus was saying that God actually searches for lost sinners. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law had never heard stories like this. How could they agree that it was the responsibility of a shepherd to search for a lost sheep and a woman to search for a lost coin and still condemn Jesus for

seeking to recover lost souls? How could they understand the joys of the humble man and a poor woman in a village over the discovery of a lost sheep and a lost coin and totally fail to comprehend the joy of God in heaven over the eternal salvation of a lost soul? But they couldn't, instead they were offended, insulted, and angry, there was no place in their legalistic religion for a God like this. The God of the Bible was not their god.

IV. Conclusion

The story of the lost sheep reminds us that as Jesus said in [John 10:11](#), “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” As the Good Shepherd Jesus “came to seek and to save the lost.” But He didn't come to just find the lost sheep; He came to lay down His life for them—[turn to Isaiah 53:4-6](#).

The woman with the lost coin represents God in Christ seeking lost sinners in the cracks, dust, and debris of a dirty world of sin. God initiated the search for those sinners who belong to Him since like the lifeless, inanimate coin, they can do nothing on their own—[turn to Ephesians 2:1-3, 8-9](#). Jesus came all the way from heaven to earth to search for His lost ones, pursuing sinners into every dark corner and then shining the light of the gospel on them. Having found the lost sinner, Jesus Christ then restores him or her to God's heavenly flock and collection of jewels and then expresses joy in which the inhabitants of heaven share.

Something that isn't seen in the stories of the sheep and the coin, since they are rather inanimate objects, is that God's seeking and saving lost sinners doesn't happen without their repentance—Jesus put it this way in [John 6:37](#), “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” Paraphrasing Joshua's call to the people in [Joshua 24:15](#), every person must choose whom they will serve. Jesus wasn't finished with His lesson for the Pharisees. The repentance part of the

story is seen in the third parable—the Parable of the Prodigal Son; a story of two sons and a loving father.

We'll look at this parable next week.