

## #23 - Sheep, silver and the prodigal - Luke 15

### Engage:

At this point in the ministry of Jesus, He was within a few months of the time when He would go to the cross – and He knew it! Everywhere He went there were people following Him, along with His chosen disciples. Included was a group of Jewish religious leaders who questioned Him. It was crunch time. His opportunity to communicate what He wanted His disciples to know was coming to a close.

In Luke 14 – Jesus attended a meal at the home of a prominent Pharisee. There was a person in attendance who needed to be healed. Jesus healed that person – but it was on the Sabbath! His response to the Jewish leaders left them speechless. Jesus then continued to teach those attending about the need to humble yourself rather than exalt yourself.

At the same banquet Jesus told a story about people who were invited to a banquet who excused themselves because they were “busy” and refused to come. He then said the servants were to go out into the streets and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Point: There are always people who will come to the banquet (and to Jesus) – if we will go and invite them!

While traveling with His disciples after this event, Jesus re-emphasized the price it would take to be one of His disciples – He said: “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” This is hard, but necessary language to communicate what it means to follow Jesus.

This takes us to our story from Luke 15. On another occasion, there was a group of tax collectors and other “sinners”, along with a group of Pharisees and teachers of the law with Jesus. The Jewish leaders said: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!” In other words, they were critical of Jesus because He hung out with sinners and even ate with them. Jesus proceeded to tell them a parable that has three different stories with the same point: There is joy in heaven when one person repents because they are lost! (Luke 15:7, 10, 32). One story is about a lost sheep (1 of 100) in need of a shepherd, another about a lost coin (1 of 10) that needed to be found and a third about a lost son who needed to renew his relationship with his father!

Note: “Teaching that is plain and to the point is bound to produce a response—sometimes positive, but more often negative! Christ’s sermons are no exception. Never attempting to make God’s truth merely palatable or comfortable, Jesus is not afraid to call for repentance (13:3, 5) or to call a fox a “fox” (13:32)! But there is a tender side to His teaching as well. The love of the Savior for lost sinners permeates chapter 15, where three times He states that the heavens rejoice over one lost sinner who repents (15:7, 10, 32).” *DW*, Oct, 2003

### Thoughts about the story:

#### Luke 15:1-2 – Introduction

The first two verses set up the opportunity for Jesus to tell the three parables back to back about the joy of finding that which is lost! This passage also points back to the message Jesus taught at the banquet in the home of the Pharisee (see 14:1-24).

Note: “The word *sinners* (15:1) designates the people of the street whom the Pharisees looked down upon with contempt because they did not know the Law (Jn 7:49) or keep the traditions of the elders. The Pharisees grumbled because they did not share Jesus’ heart for reclaiming lost individuals. In response, Jesus tells them three parables about a lost sheep, a lost piece of silver, and a lost son to show that God rejoices over the recovery of every one lost sinner.” *DW*, Oct, 2003

Point: When Jesus ate with sinners, they didn’t defile Him. Instead, He offered the opportunity to “clean them up.” For example, when Jesus healed the leper, he was cleansed, but Jesus was not defiled. It was the joy of Jesus’ life to search for, find and then offer cleansing to a sinner. It should be yours too!

#### Luke 15:3-7 – The parable of the lost sheep

Jesus’ audience would easily identify with this story. Sheep were all around. They were a valuable agricultural commodity. Everyone knew that sheep get lost. It was a common problem. It was only natural to look for some of them to get lost.

Jesus taught us to do what was expected of a shepherd to do – seek out and bring the lost safely back into the fold. This makes even more sense when we understand that “sheep” in the Old Testament were characterized as God’s people (See Psalm 23; 119:176; Ezekiel 34:11ff; Isaiah 40:10-11; 53:6; Zechariah 11:16-17).

People in God’s eyes are special. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

#### Luke 15:8-10 – The parable of the lost coin

- The lost coin was a “drachma” – equal to roughly a day’s wage.
- Women did not generally work. The coin that was lost had most likely either been given to her by her husband or was part of her dowry. Either way, it would be considered very valuable to her and a large embarrassment if she lost it. That is why she called on her female friends to help her find it. (Note: The original text indicates that her “friends” and “neighbors” were female. This is not something that translates into the English.) Point: In the story, her husband may have never known that she lost the coin.

#### Luke 15:11-32 – The parable of the lost son

This is the most famous of the three parables. Charles Dickens said: “It is the finest short story ever written.”

This reaches the climax of what Jesus communicated that day – lost people matter to God. It is the longest parable Jesus ever told. It has two parts:

- The son who wanders versus the son who doesn’t
- The son who gets lost away from home versus the son who gets lost at home.
- “The second son is equally important because it brings us back to vv. 1-2 where the Pharisees (like the son who did not wander) complain about Jesus socializing with lost sons.” (Mark Moore)

The father did not have to give the son his inheritance early, but he did. Since the father was looking for his son to return home, he must have hoped that being away would help bring his son to repentance – and no doubt being rejected by his “friends”, having to take a job feeding pigs and then eating their food did! The wandering son wisely chose to return home as a repentant son!

When the son returned, the father was the first to welcome him back. He disregarded what his lost son had done, looked like or what he had experienced. His only concern was that he had returned home. He threw a party to demonstrate his joy (i.e. the Tony Compolo story about throwing a birthday party at 3:30 am for a prostitute named Agnes - see note at the end of this handout)! He gave his repentant son a robe (indicating the he was the guest of honor), a ring (a sign of authority) and a pair of sandals (signifying that he was not a slave or hired servant).

To cap it all off, the story says that the son was “alive again.” This carries the same idea of being “resurrected” (Romans 6:4, 9; 8:10-11; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13) or “born again” after being dead because of the result of sin (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

The conclusion to the last parable ends with the father going to the older brother who stayed. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in the same day that the father needed to reach out to rescue a lost son by demonstrating grace and love, rather than justice to one who was lost.

### **Extra:**

“There is no sadder place than a lost and found department. Sad because so many items of value have become separated from their owners. Sad because useful items are sitting uselessly on the shelf. Sad because so many owners have forgotten they lost something. It’s bad enough to be an unclaimed object; it’s worse yet to be unwanted and unmissed.

Luke 15 provides a threefold reminder that God is not a forgetful owner whose lost possession is unwanted or unmissed. Rather, He is a seeking, searching heavenly Father. Like a tender shepherd, He scans high and how for lost sinners—lost objects of His love and concern. In the words of a popular gospel song, ‘Time after time He has waited before, and now He is waiting again . . . To see if you’re willing to open the door; O how He wants to come in!’ What is your answer to the invitation of your Savior? The angels in heaven are waiting for another reason to rejoice!” *DW*, Oct, 2003

### **Quotes:**

“God loves each of us as if there was only one of us.” (unknown)

“You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.” (unknown)

Note: The Tony Compolo story ends with the owner of the diner asking Tony Compolo about the kind of church that he belonged to. Compolo’s answer was, “The kind of church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 am in the morning.” The owner then said: “There ain’t no church like that. And if there was, I’d join it.” (If you Google Tony Compolo, you can find a YouTube video of him telling this story. It is really good.)

The challenge is this: Maybe there is such a church – and maybe it is Morton CC. May we be a church that cares for prostitutes and other sinners who are lost. May Morton CC be a

congregation of people who believe that one lost sheep is worth the risk and the price necessary to rescue the one who is lost.

Lost People Matter To God  
Do Lost People Matter To You  
How Will You Respond?

**Discussion starters:**

- How can you show God's love and forgiveness to an undeserving person?
- How can you guard yourself from feeling resentment when God shows mercy to people you think don't deserve it?
- Think back to a time when you wandered in your faith. What brought you back?
- How do these three stories make you feel about your value to God?
- How should these stories affect how you feel towards others who have wandered from God?