

# The Lost

Isaiah 12:1-6, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Luke 15: 1-3 11-32

I think we all have lost things in our lives, maybe even on a daily basis we lose or misplace certain items whether they were keys, phones, wallets and purses, you felt oh my, now what am I going to do? It's a terrible feeling, but most times it's a short-term anxious feeling that goes away in a little while when they are found again, you feel so much better.

Then how many of you have ever felt alone, felt rejected, felt why am I in this relationship, felt unworthy because of something you did or said, or maybe it's an addiction that's alive and thriving or maybe your past the action part of the addiction but haven't admitted or just can't shake the thoughts of "I did that for years, I can't believe I did that to those I should have loved the most". These feelings can be crushing, and last years, and sadly for some, lifetimes. There are many, but these are some of the different ways Satan makes us feel **LOST**.

Luke 15:7 was not part of the reading today but as I attempt to bring the message today to life for us, I believe that it is so important, it makes this message like a personal guarantee to each of us to a point I can't comprehend, but yet seem to somehow understand. It says, "**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**". Just remember and think about this verse as we go along.

This brings me to Jesus and His incredible love for us, and to the great lengths in which He has went to gather back which was lost, to bring us back into His fold. As I was preparing, I couldn't help but think of our church and what He has planned for us! AMEN! I pray we can learn about His perseverance and resilience in seeking us and finding us when we think we have gone too far away from Him.

This will teach us not only some of His great gifts when He was here on earth, but also His great compassion He now has for us as He rules from heaven over His people. And then, now the calling He has for us as His people to be rescuers with Him who will go as He did to seek and save the lost through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The theme today is that of the lost things being found:

- A lost son who was embraced by a loving father.
- A lost sibling who will be embraced by the same father, even though he never wandered far from home.
- I didn't forget, the love of our Father, and the trust we can have in Him, the example to us worldly fathers to follow.

The reality of being human is that we lose things. The older we get the more we have lost in which we consider valuable, including someday's our minds?? But no matter what we lose, we go through the same process:

- First, we realize we lost something.
- Then there is the fear we will never find it again.
- Followed by an all-out search by us and sometimes others to find it.

As bad as it may seem to lose your phone or wallet, we human beings have been lost for a long time. Some of the first words spoken in the Garden of Eden after the fall were Genesis 3:9 But the Lord God called to the man, where are you?"

Adam knew where he was. He was in the Garden of Eden and God knew that also, as He knows all. The question implied that Adam was lost spiritually. The Bible also says many times that each of us are lost spiritually as well. We are in the dark. As Ephesians 2:1 says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins."

We all work really hard pretending we're not lost. "Oh, I know right where I'm going and which way it is to go also!" But sadly, all of us people are lost and because we're lost, we are without hope if we try to be found on our own. Refer back to what was suggested earlier as we were found by Jesus, we are to be rescuers alongside of him, as His tongue and hands with His Gospel.

The Gospel starts today with Luke 15:1, It says, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

The Pharisees were always grumbling. As Jesus was doing His ministry in Palestine in the first century there were patterns arising. When Jesus taught, preached, healed or exorcised demons the people wanted more. In fact, Luke says they were all drawing near to Jesus. We're they squishing Him. They wanted to be with Him constantly, and we often here it said Jesus had to retreat from the crowd to be with His Father.

You see Jesus was unlike anyone else they ever seen or experienced. He taught with both authority and humility. He taught them about justice, but He spoke with love, grace, mercy and compassion. He had more knowledge than the Pharisees, yet His teachings were simple truths. Even His critics could not deny His signs and wonders that He performed.

Luke also talks about two types of sinners, which we can break down even further. We maybe can see this first group in a little more common language as white collar and blue-collar sinners.

First off, the white-collar sinners were the tax collectors, or in our day IRS agents. The first century tax collectors were not very good people, they were Jews who had been hired by the Roman Empire to collect taxes from the Jewish people. At the time it was more like being employed by the enemy and their job was to levy money from their family, friends and neighbors, then give that money to the enemy.

What also made them doubly unpopular was they would also extort money from these people not only for Rome but for themselves as their own revenue stream. The Bible tells us in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). That it was mentioned stealing from people. So in this day of Jesus tax collectors were often rich and hated, so we call them white-collar sinners, never the less they also started to fall in love with Jesus.

The blue-collar sinners. These are the people who had been banned from the temple, because they were labeled unclean. They didn't meet the standards of Moses, or the standards of holiness established by the Pharisees and scribes. These were the fornicators, adulterers and swindlers. People with a past and hung around with wrong people. Yet they too had fallen in love with Jesus and wanted to be near Him. These were the blue-collar sinners.

So why would these types of people come to Jesus? As sinful busted people as they were, Jesus was speaking grace to them. He offered them love and mercy and acceptance, giving them an opportunity for a new life. Like those looking for shade on a blistering hot day, these people came in droves to get what Jesus offered them.

Enter the second group: the Pharisees and scribes. The Pharisees were the religious muckety-mucks of the first century. They were the important people who established the regulations of

Jewish religious life. They were the ones who told you whether you were going to heaven or not. They decided if you were good enough to be part of their religious club. They decided if you had dotted all your I's and crossed all your T's and were worthy to be accepted by God.

The scribes were important because they had the task of copying the canon of Scripture, the law and the prophets. They did all they could to protect the sacred words, which were read and studied only by those who were worthy of that task. They were religious leaders who also helped to determine who was loved by God.

### **LUKE TELLS US ABOUT ONE BIG PROBLEM.**

In Luke 15, Jesus was not simply addressing the crowd of people who loved Him but was surrounded by a uptight mix of people. One group of people knew they were broken sinners who were drawn to Jesus because of the grace He offered. At the same time, the other group was telling them they could not be close to God, because God did not accept those whose lives were not put together right.

That produced an ongoing tension in this moment in Luke 15, where Jesus found Himself. He's claiming He's the Messiah, but the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling because they didn't understand how a holy and righteous God could spend time with tax collectors, prostitutes, fornicators and swindlers. The Pharisees thought if God was going to put on flesh and dwell among us, He surely would only hang out with those who were righteous, as they believed themselves to be.

So how did Jesus decide to address this tense situation? He did it by telling three stories. One of which we heard today in these stories, He included those who were broken and flawed, who were consumed in their own sin, speaking specifically to them. But He also included those who believed it was their place to decide who received mercy and who didn't.

That's what's so great about these stories: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Within each story, we get to find ourselves. Jesus took the problem of two opposed situations and in these stories, He was able to address everyone involved. But for us to be changed by these stories, we have to relive them.

Does Jesus call us to see ourselves in these stories? For example, does He want us to put on our shepherd's gear and become a shepherd. Maybe today you're a Pharisee, thinking you can decide who is holy and who's sinful. Based on your criteria, you can say who's clean and who's unclean. Jesus has a word for you, Pharisee.

Or maybe today you've come here broken. Your sin is always before you. Your mistake and failures, both those others see, and those only God sees, cause you to think, "How can a just and righteous God possibly love me? How could He accept me?" Not only does Jesus' love and accept you, He's been on an all-out search to find you in your wandering. You may be the sheep in the story.

The great thing about Jesus' storytelling is He addresses two completely different groups of people with the same gospel and the same challenge. To be loved and accepted by God is to put ourselves

into the story, without looking to the left or the right to what others are thinking or how they're responding.

Finally, we need to realize the significance of this first, of the three stories Jesus told. This involves asking four questions.

### **IS YOUR PROXIMITY TO SINNERS A PROBLEM?**

Your first response to this question might be to quote, "Bad company corrupts good character." That's true. But that's not what Jesus is asking. Rather, He's asking if we're choosing to wall ourselves off from the unbelieving world around us, trying to keep ourselves from the rescue mission He modeled for us. Christ came to seek and save that which was lost.

To find lost people, you must go where they are, but we can be really good at walling ourselves off from unbelievers. We can be too busy doing ministry in the church to have time to engage our communities. That means we are like the Pharisees, only standing with the clean and holy people—people who live like us and dress like us—instead of going to the place where we're needed most. It is there where we will find people who are broken and lost, sheep without a shepherd. When we do this, we're lacking the very compassion God wants His people to have.

Notice Luke says in Luke 15:1 that the people were "drawing near" to Jesus, because the scribes and Pharisees were grumbling that Jesus "receives sinners." In our vocabulary, receive means to give full access to. He made time for them. He created a relationship space for them. He made room in His life, not only to receive them, but to eat with them.



In the Middle Eastern culture, to eat with a person is to acknowledge their high value. Their meals take hours, so that means giving a person a lot of your time. You show them your trust by bringing them into your home. Jesus is saying this is how we should receive sinners. We're to make space for them in our lives.

That person you work with, that neighbor of yours, that person in your school who's living in the wrong way—your job isn't to wall them off. Rather, you need to create relational space so they might see the salvation message lived out in your life that we get from our reading in Isaiah. They need to be aware that there is a holy, righteous and loving God Who is on an all-out search for them and Who has compassion and mercy for them.

Is your proximity to sinners a problem? If we're honest, most of us would say it is. We're not interacting with sinners around us who need the gospel of Jesus Christ. But God calls us to this.

Closer to home, you might have heard of the ladies from Northridge Church, I believe, that they went to an establishment for a long time not to wallow in its trough but the intent to close it down and take it down.

Also, our brothers and sisters at Hope Church bought a tavern and now it's a building for their church. How great is that?

### **ARE YOU WILLING TO GO OR JUST GRUMBLING?**

It's our choice. Are we just going to grumble about what we see or are we going to go? Are we going to do what Jesus has asked? I've learned in my 60 years that if you're not going, you're grumbling, I find myself on either side of that fence often.

Remember the two old dudes at the Muppet Show in the balcony? Everybody else is having a grand time doing the show, but those two guys who aren't doing anything are grumbling upstairs. We have a call to not be the Pharisees in this story who grumble about the people Jesus is interacting with. Instead, we should go to them ourselves.

That's why I love this church. Jesus has helped our church, by His grace and mercy, to see the world through His eyes. I have been at other churches that have different focuses, the ones that pour into their youth seem to thrive. I see that here.

I see people here who go on mission and overnight trips with our kids relentlessly sharing with them and living out the instructions given by Jesus. We have the wagon; we just need to get back on it. We need to stand up with these people and our youth and teach them so that our church goes well beyond our time. I have gone one time with our youth leaders and would plan to go again in the future. We can grumble, my friends, or we can go. Jesus wants us to go.

### **ARE YOU REJOICING IN GOD'S RESCUE?**

The first two questions are about you serving others, but now I want you to serve yourself for a moment. I want you to remember your salvation story. Remember how you once were lost and how you were found. In other words, put yourself in the shoes of that son that left. Have you forgotten the feeling of being lost? Have you forgotten what it was like to feel isolated and alone? Have you forgotten what it was like to come back home? Do you remember

wondering how He would respond to you? Would He be angry? And do you remember your joy when you realized He was not angry, but instead loved you and wanted to care for you?

Have you been saved so long that you have forgotten what it was like to be lost and then found? Have you forgotten what it was like to be blind? To be held captive by the evil one? Have you forgotten the great joy of your salvation, that the God of the universe—instead of leaving you in your sin—went on an all-out rescue mission to find you?

Mercy came running and it has set you free.

Let us never grow weary in worshiping God for what He has done. Our anthem should be about Jesus, who found us when we were lost, who brought us back when we went astray.

Our life, energy and focus from this day on should be the worship, adoration of and service to that God. Amen?

Are we rejoicing in our own rescue?

## **HAVE YOU REPENTED AND RETURNED TO THE FOLD?**

Jesus brings His story to a head by telling us that the joy the father felt is the same joy the angelic hosts feel when one sinner repents. This begs two questions: are you a sinner? And have you repented? The answer to the first question is yes. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

The more important question is had you repented? That's a big word; one we don't use very often. What does repentance mean? Repentance involves three things.

- First, it requires confession. In this story, it is the confession of the son. "I ran away. I went astray and I got lost." Confession involves contrition, which means sorrow. "I'm sorry for wandering, for going my own way. I'm sorry for not doing what I was called to do."
- Repentance also includes the recognition that God is the Good Shepherd Who has come to find, rescue, love and care for us.
- And repentance results in change. "I'm never going to do that again. By Your grace and mercy, Shepherd, I'm never going to wander away again. But I also know that even if I am prone to wander, in Your great love You will come find me.

Our repentance doesn't just take care of one of our sins. We are being saved anew every time we wander away, through our disobedience or distraction. God will find us repeatedly. Have you repented? I don't want you to leave today without knowing that although you are lost, you can be found by the great and glorious Savior Whose name is Jesus Christ.

You need to realize the depths He went to in order to rescue you. He went to a cross bearing all your burdens, so He could carry you back to the fold. That's the greatness of this story. It's a story that's intended to change us, to remind us of where we've been and where we now are. When we repent, He is faithful and just to forgive

us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). It is He Who scoops us up in His love and compassion, never to let us go again. That is the great truth of the story of the run away son. My prayer is that we will take this truth and apply it to our own lives in the days to come.

In Isaiah we learned that God the Father is among us, He loves us, that His anger is only short lived, that we can trust and be comforted in times of good and trouble in our lives. To concentrate on Him and have His joy we will draw His living water, His power, to share with others, you my brothers and sisters, for our salvation.