

The greatness of salvation

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[0 : 0 0] Our main passage is indeed Luke chapter 15 so please have your Bible open at that particular passage. Last Sunday morning I asked the question at the end of one year and the start of a new year what might we consider?

and I suggested that the gospel of Jesus Christ was a very good theme for us to adopt without this the church has no reason for being here.

It's a very sobering thought as we look back what does all our history amount to if there is no good news about Jesus Christ? Also without the good news of Jesus Christ we actually have no future. It could be a museum, it could be a sort of a cultural artifact, a place to visit where people might say well this is how people used to believe but now we all know better.

And the same could be said about us personally on this matter hinges our life now and what happens after we die. The gospel of Jesus Christ. So it's good for us to be reminded and reinforced and refreshed in the gospel.

[1 : 1 6] How good is this gospel and how great is this message? Last Sunday we looked at this particular text 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

It's written to Christian people, not perfect people a great mix of people with all kinds of backgrounds and all kinds of baggage but yet this is a message which is proclaimed boldly, clearly to all these people and it said to them you know something about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and we thought about the greatness of what happens to us when we become Christians we have been taken from a place of poverty to riches of course I don't speak here about money and wealth and estate and intellectual capability and prospects in terms of any kind of job and career and so forth all of which are important in God's eyes but they're not the fundamentals that make human beings tick and what really matters to us but I do speak of the matters for which Jesus Christ became a man and for which he died upon a cross and these are matters to do with the fact of our being in a non-friendly relationship with God lacking comprehensive forgiveness in our lives and crippled by burdens of guilt and frustration because of that having nothing that you could ever deem to be a lasting purpose so that you could say with confidence this is going to go beyond my life with a gnawing sense of suspicion that we have very little power to change ourselves and worst of all with no awareness that we are poor now Jesus Christ has made us very rich so that we put a line through all the no's and we say most positively that all these things become true of us we become aware that we're spiritually poor and we have need and how wonderful that we can call God our Father and be members of his family with brothers and sisters that there is a comprehensive forgiveness so that we can say whatever we have done there is cleansing in the blood of Jesus Christ and that God is able to pass that by because it's all been dealt with upon the cross that we have a lasting purpose we've actually discovered the reason for which we were created which was to serve and to worship our Creator we've come home and wonderful it is that we're not the same people as we were this time last year but by God's grace by his power we are being changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ and that is the calling of every single believer and these are the riches which have come to us because of our great Saviour and because he was so poor so the Bible says we have been taken from darkness to light from death to life and in the most powerful phrase from the power of Satan to God and we read there are actually a couple of verses but the final verse in Luke chapter 15 puts this very graphically this brother of yours was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found well if you're a Christian this morning that's actually a description of you and what an enormous privilege that is and we hasten to quickly add this privilege is ours not because of any efforts on our own part but by the powerful working of the grace of God in our lives

by the finished work of Jesus Christ well that's a great thing and well we move on this morning to think about something else to do with this salvation this salvation experience it's a very well known story there are three stories in fact we'll bound up into sort of one continuous message here there's a story here about a sheep verses 1 to 7 there's a story here about a coin verses 8 to 10 and the rest of the chapter concerns a son there are pictures of us and I'm sure that most of us we've read this passage before we've heard it preached on we've been encouraged to consider ourselves as the sheep that is lost as the coin that's been mislaid as the son who's gone astray and we're encouraged from that to sense that God has purposes of finding people like us we read these stories and think about what it means to us and that's absolutely natural these are pictures of us 98% now this was a statistic this last week from someone who'd done a degree in psychology this person said that 98% of the time we're thinking about ourselves

I thought that can't be true they said well actually probably is in some way or other because whatever we do we're kind of always reflecting back whatever is done upon ourselves in some fashion or other and as we look at this particular story there we are 98% of the time we're thinking about ourselves don't get bogged down with that thought and say well actually I think it's 85% I'm just telling you what I've been told and it just sort of rang true thinking about ourselves and as Christians we spend a lot of time thinking about ourselves and when we talk about this matter of salvation we think of it immediately in terms of ourselves and that's well and good and that's quite natural and it's quite proper there are many places in the Bible where God encourages us to think about ourselves I remember the that text in Isaiah where he says come let us reason together he's coming to a people who are in need though your sins be as scarlet they'll be as white as snow saying let's have a dialogue about this

I've got something to offer you something to make it better for you in your life and God does deal with us like in that fashion he reasons with us and encourages us to think in self-interest terms but I want to look at this passage this morning and think of it in terms of what salvation means to God what does salvation mean to God so I go back a few slides there you can see that whilst this passage has much to say about the thing which is lost it also has something to say about the people who have lost something the man has lost a sheep the woman has lost a coin and the father has lost a son this has not happened in a vacuum something has been lost and someone has lost it and in fact when you begin to look at this passage with those sorts of spectacles you can see that you really you really can't understand this passage in its totality without understanding that there is a great amount of text here which has to do with the feelings and the work and the reaction of the people who have lost something firstly something of value has been lost something of value has been lost repeat again a man loses his sheep this is not sentimental despite all the kind of pictures that were done in the Victorian era of the shepherd and this lost sheep and this kind of glow about this idea of the shepherd finding this lost sheep and the affection between the shepherd and the sheep

[10:47] I don't think we are to read this passage in that kind of way this is about work and livelihood the sheep is valuable the sheep has a value the woman loses a coin this is not sentimental the coin actually matters I think you'll find in a footnote to your Bible there it will say that the coin is like a day's wages well I don't know how much you're paid per hour but a day's wages is quite a lot if you had ten coins and each of those represented a day's wages that if you lose one of those then that's quite a lot of money so she's scrabbling around on the floor and trying to find this coin that is lost not just because she's a perfectionist and likes to have everything neat and tidy but because this is actually important it probably isn't to do with her day to day living but it may be something to do with her savings the provision that she's making for a future

I'm sure most of the people at the time lived from hand to mouth so if they had any extra over if it was there for their children then all that was very precious and to lose one of those was very important but the father loses a son and that's very different I'm interested to note that there are two sons in the story and the one who gets lost is the younger son so we're not talking here about an inheritance because the prime inheritance would go to the older son we're not talking here about the family line and that wasn't the issue that the father was so concerned about you know who would inherit the farm who would take on the family business who would take forward the family line there's two sons here, there's not just one and it's not a matter of livelihood this son sounds like somebody who was actually a drain on the family resources rather than a benefit to it in many ways it was like the teenager who was ready to leave home he'd be rather pleased if he'd pushed out the

door he wasn't a great blessing in that sense but there was something that was lost when this second son left the home and that was the relationship

I think as we read these stories we need to read them together and to recognise that something valuable has been lost it has value in itself but for God which isn't just a question of pounds shillings and pence involved here but it's something about a relationship a relationship has been lost this takes us back to the beginning of the Bible we look in the book of Genesis and we see that God has lost something in the garden the man and the woman they're made in the image of God and they have a relationship with him and God loves to be spending time with them he has plans for them he has desires for them he's interested in them he wants to be with them a value that exceeds all the rest of the creation that he's made because they're made in his image in a way that they can relate to him and he to them but the well known story of the Bible says that that relationship has been broken and we call that the fall but it could be called the losing the losing of course they lost something they lost something desperately big but God lost something as well secondly this matters to God

I'm interested in the arithmetic quite deliberate why are there 99 other sheep is that the standard statistical size of flocks in Israel at that time I don't know but one sheep has gone missing out of a hundred that's quite a lot isn't it if you had a hundred sheep in this room if one had gone missing one out of ten coins and one out of two sons it's interesting I think that in some kind of way all this is telling us that one person matters to God whether they're in a family group of a hundred or whether they're one out of two one person matters to God he notices one the Bible does deal in nations and family groups ethnicity and so forth and so forth but fundamentally

God's concerns and this isn't just this sort of arrogance of ego this is the constant trend and drift of the Bible and we see that really in the way the Lord Jesus Christ relates to people when he's upon earth he speaks to the crowd but he speaks to the woman at the well he speaks to Zacchaeus up the tree he speaks to blind Bartimaeus he speaks one by one to his own disciples he knows them by name and he knows each one who's lost he knows each one of us we think we're one of a hundred or a thousand or a million 258,000 people live in Brighton and Hove we're one of 258,000 people 250 people work at my place of work

[17:33] I've lost one of 250 34745 massive big number you come from a family there are others in your family the very minimum there's probably sort of two or three of you there might be many more you're just one of those but you see it doesn't really work like that in God's eyes you are the one you are the one and it matters very, very much to God it matters to him because he has lost you I want us to see in these pictures of the man and the woman and the father with which this audience would have been able to identify in some fashion and perhaps as one of the stories here that identifies with you especially but we see here the picture of God and especially God as Father notice

God's single minded effort to recover what is lost so if you have your Bible please look at these these verses as shown on the screen verse 4 suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them pause suppose what does the shepherd do does he not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it how long will that take?

we don't know but this is what the shepherd does he puts aside if you like the normal day job he puts aside the 99 and he goes and searches for the one and he has to use all his ingenuity all his skill all his innate ability to find the one it isn't straightforward, it isn't simple it's potentially dangerous that's the measure of the effort that the shepherd takes and it's the measure of the effort that God as Father takes in looking out or verse 8 does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it that's a big job isn't it we're always losing things in my house and I say to Katie, where do we put that?

it's lost it takes such a long time to find things that are lost sometimes I say don't let's even worry about it we'll just carry on our normal lives and as we go about our life we'll find the thing that is lost but not so with this particular woman she had to go to the clinic but she is so consumed and disturbed and distressed that she drops everything and at that particular point she lights the lamp and it makes it her business to go through the house room by room by room until she finds this tiny coin which I'm quite sure wasn't nice and glittery we saw The Hobbit on Friday great film, not for everybody great film, desolation of smorg big dragon, enormous glinting coins and treasure everywhere you couldn't mistake all the sort of glittery stuff but I don't think this coin was like that at all I think it was just dull dull like an old English penny somewhere buried away she might well have gone through three rooms had to go back to the first room again and then eventually she finds it big

effort

I'm thinking about this father actually it doesn't say that he sent servants into the far country he didn't put out a missing persons for the local constabulary he didn't do that at all but we do read something about him in verse 20 while the son was still a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him ran to his son through his arms around him and kissed him he'd never forgotten his son!

[22 : 24] he woke up in the morning he went to bed at night he was on the lookout for the returning boy he was anticipating not so much physical energy here but certainly mental and emotional energy is being expended by the father towards this missing son we see of course how much it meant to him what a kind of outpouring of gladness what a relief that's my son he pictured that day he thought about that time maybe he'd seen other figures on the horizon before and he'd been sort of but not on that day and he recognised his shape the way he did everything and the release of his emotional and thankfulness as his son returns

I want to say to you that God is absolutely single minded in his efforts to recover what is lost it isn't a little thing for God that people are lost it isn't a little thing for him that you might be lost this morning no as we reminded last week there was this intense intense loving and wise and wise discussion within the trinity of God that culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ to this earth from heaven the laying aside of his riches and richness so he might become so poor that he might recover that which was lost we should never be tempted to feel that this is kind of a secondary matter at all and we see here the spontaneous and unrestrained joy at recovery verses 5, 6, 7, 10, 22 to 24 it's a joy to be shared joy to be shared have any of you ever done something like this when you found something and you've actually called up your neighbours and friends and you said

I want to have a party to rejoice over this I don't think I've ever done that I've had a little yes moment share it with my wife but it's kind of big isn't it it's really big in this case this is a time to pause this is a time to stop this is a time to really rejoice so look at these verses with me because they say the same thing but the fact that they are repeated tells us that we have to get a grip of what God feels about lost people coming back to himself when he finds that he joyfully puts it on his shoulders joyfully puts it on his shoulders joyfully puts it on his shoulders then he calls his friends and neighbours together rejoice with me I found my lost sheep I tell you the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent don't quite know exactly what that means but I do believe it puts a priority upon the fact that

God and the whole of heaven is convulsed with joyfulness over one person who becomes found who is recovered it's a massive thing it's almost as if heaven stops at that moment because of this great thing that has happened as a shrump it sounds he was dead he's alive he was lost verse 10 when she finds it she calls her friends and neighbours together and says rejoice with me I found my lost coin it's almost as if she went around the street up down the street knocked on the door and she said come on I want you to just come in just want you to come in and when they were all there in that one place I've got something very very special to tell you!

verses 22 to 24 the father said to his servants quick bring the best robe put it on him put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet bring the fattened calf and kill it let's have a feast and celebrate it's pretty clear from the elder son's reaction that this isn't the natural temperament in a way of his father they didn't have parties every day it wasn't the way his father normally was but on this day something massive had happened something wonderful had happened and it's almost as if all the restraints and all the bounds and so forth no expense spared no expense spared we're going to have a massive party at this point spontaneous unrestrained joy at recovery a joy to be shared something lost has been regained something lost has been regained and I want you to look at these verses please turn them up in your Bibles our relationship with God our relationship with God has been regained that's what salvation does it was there once in Adam it was lost it's been found better and stronger now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ our worship this is what Jesus said to the woman at the well what is God seeking [29 : 16] John chapter 4 verse 23 worshippers worshipping the father in spirit of truth these are the kind of worshippers the father seeks the father is seeking people to worship him you don't have to be any doubt about that today this morning you don't have to be any doubt about that what does God the father want of you he wants your worship and this is what he recovers when people come to him through Jesus Christ he receives our love some of you would find it very strange to think

back a few years and to think that you would actually say I love God that's a strange thing 1 John 4 19 tells us that we do love God we love because he first loved us we didn't love before but we do now because we've been found by Jesus Christ and 1 Thessalonians 1 9

God receives our service our service 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 9 verse 9 they tell how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and the true God another place Paul speaks to Christians and he talks about the fact that you spent you spent long enough time chasing after other things you spent long enough in your life serving other gods other idols that's the implication here we're serving something if we don't belong to God through Jesus Christ we're serving something else and this is what happens when lost people are found and this salvation is working in people's lives they turn from serving dead lifeless idols to serve the living and the true God so that's the list it's a great list isn't it?

so that's the list it's a great list isn't it? this is how it is from God's perspective so I offer these three thoughts in closing how great is our God how great is our God that he should have imagined this amazing salvation plan that a world of lost people should be recovered to him to be recovered to him with such assurance with such a knowledge that he knew that now I've got these people back they're never, never, never going to leave me again every single one of those who have been found by Jesus Christ will be with him forever and he will never let them go that's for you and for me Romans 11 verses 33 to 36 feels like a punctuation point in the midst of the reasoning that Paul has made concerning the salvation of God oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable his judgments!

who has known the mind of the Lord? who has been his counselor? who has ever given to God that God should repay him? for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever and how wonderfully encouraging this is for us it must be encouraging that God welcomes sinners!

this was the whole reason for Luke 15 in the first place this particular passage is because the chief priest and the scribes came to him and he was mixing with sinners he was with sinners what's he doing there?

[33 : 46] and he's saying that's exactly where God wants to be well I take that for us today to mean that God is interested in every single one of us gives us great confidence as we live our lives today today in this world which is sort of flooded and bloated with its own self sense of sophistication and ability is blind to these matters and so forth that's the hardest thing of all we live in a world where there's a sort of blanket ignorance and disbelief and a sort of laughing of all these sorts of matters well that's sin that's sin whether people believe in God we're all under this sort of blanket condemnation does God care about the people of Stanley Road and so forth?

you say well I'm really not too sure but does God care about them? paid him any interest for years and years they live in the whole of their lives in ignorance of him and you go and put a leaflet through their door and they're not interested it's just another bit of junk mail is God interested in them?

is God interested in them? the Bible says he's very interested in them and this encourages us it encourages us in our praying in our work in our hope the Bible in our hope and he doesn't without evidence of that does he?

because year on year we see somebody coming out of their lostness and being found and we'd love to see more and a passage like this encourages us to have no doubt at all about the integrity and the sincerity and the seriousness of God's concern for lost people and what a great salvation this is a salvation that finds people who are genuinely lost it isn't a game it isn't hide and seek going on it isn't just people playing a bit difficult to get we saw earlier people are dead in their sins it's only the power of God that's going to make us alive they're riddled with God's judgement it's only the forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers that will actually lift the burden of judgement!

these are the wonderful things that God does this is the greatness of salvation what a great message what a great message for 2014 as much as 1614 unchanging message God God still has many people whom He is intent on finding and bringing into His kingdom so let us share in that work let us rejoice in it if we too have known that salvation let us be thankful to such a great God Amen