

# AM Luke 15:1-32 Helplessly Lost, Hopelessly Lost, Hedonistically Lost

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Amen. Our scripture reading this morning is taken from Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 15, verses 1 to 32.

That's page 1053 in the Pew Bibles, page 1053. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he's lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he's found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

[ 1 : 23 ]     Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

And when she's found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

And he said, there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country.

[ 2 : 34 ]     And there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he spent everything, a severe famine arose in the country and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread? But I perish here with hunger.

I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced and kissed him.

[ 3 : 44 ] And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to the servants, Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate.

For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field.

And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and then treated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you and I have never disobeyed your command.

Yet you have never, you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him.

[ 5 : 13 ] And he said to him, Son, you are always with me. And all that I have is mine. All that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this, your brother was dead and is alive.

He was lost and is found. May God add his blessing to this public reading of his word. Amen. Amen.

Amen. I'm very conscious that we're in the season of Advent and you might think it's unusual to be looking at these parables at this time of year. But latterly in my own private study time and my own time with God, I've been looking again at the parables that Jesus taught.

Last time we looked at the Good Samaritan. And this time we're looking at these three parables that speak about lostness. The sheep that we thought about was helplessly lost.

It could not find itself. The coin that the woman lost was helplessly lost. It too could do nothing about its situation.

[ 6 : 38 ] It had to be looked for to be found. And the prodigal son, of course, was hedonistically lost. He took the earthly wealth that he had and he wasted it on reckless living.

So I'd like to tell you a story. I've asked Paula's permission to do this about lostness as we think about this subject today.

Paula's son, Chris, studied in Londonderry International Studies at the university there. And Paula went to bring him home.

It was time for him to come home. And Paula went to bring him home. She realised on the ferry that she'd forgotten to take a map. I think you took your own car that day.

She'd forgotten to take a map. But she thought it'd be okay because she'd been to Londonderry a couple of times. We'd been to Londonderry. We'd met with Chris. We'd gone out on meals. All the rest of it.

[ 7 : 45 ] So she drove off the ferry and immediately took a wrong turning. But again thought, well, this is Northern Ireland. It's not very big. I'll meet the right road eventually.

So she travelled along the road from Belfast with signs ending in Enniskilling. She thought that surely at some point Londonderry would be mentioned.

Eventually on the outskirts of Enniskilling, she accepted that she needed to get some advice. And so stopped at her garage and bought a map. She had to phone Chris because she was going to be late.

And he turned to his flatmate and said, where's Enniskilling? And discovered that Enniskilling is the furthest most point away from Londonderry that she could possibly have got to.

And she had to drive almost the same distance and up that west coast of Ireland on B roads to get eventually to Derry. This, of course, meant that the whole day was set back.

[ 8 : 48 ] The whole day was late. And the end result of this scenic deal was that together, as they were driving towards Belfast, they saw the ferry that they should have been on sailing out of the lock.

This story, I think, illustrates how easy it is to be lost. All the time you can think that you're going in the right direction, but really, you're lost.

Luke 15, verses 1 to 32 are three stories or parables that Jesus told about lostness. And I think as we move towards the advent and we move towards the birth of Christ at Christmas, it's good to ask, why did Jesus come at all to this sin-cursed earth?

One of the reasons why Jesus came was to seek and save the lost. He said himself, Luke 19, verse 10, God is proactive in saving those who are lost.

Think about your own journey of faith. Think about the people that were involved. Think about those who spoke to you for the first time about the love God has for you and the way that love was demonstrated in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 10 : 32 ] I'm grateful to a number of people who... I believe that I had a simple faith. As a child, I believed in God. We went to church every Sunday. It was part of what we did.

But when I left home when I was 16, and there were reasons for that, mostly to do with a father that had a drink problem and caused problems in the house.

So really I couldn't wait to leave. And it wasn't until I was 34 years old that God brought me back. I went my own way. I did my own thing. Coming from a family of seven, I thought that the way of success was the way of making money and a name for yourself in this world.

And to a certain degree, I guess I was quite successful in that. I left with just my train fare when I was 16, and by the time I was 30, I'd raised enough money to buy my own business. And I'd had a few notable situations on the way.

The things that the world would regard as successors. But I got to age 34, and I began to realize actually, without God, none of it mattered.

[ 11 : 48 ] None of it. It was all pointless. You know, meaningless, meaningless, said the writer to Ecclesiastes. Always meaningless. A chasing after the wind.

The very best thing that we can each have in this life is a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing comparable. Nothing even comes close.

And it's not just a relationship for now, for today. It's a relationship that lasts for all eternity. So God is proactive in seeking and saving those who are lost.

The context of this Bible passage, of course, is that some of the Pharisees and scribes were murmuring against Jesus, in the same way the Israelites murmured against Moses during the Exodus.

In fact, both incidents used the same word for murmured. They were grumbling. The complaint was to do with the people that Jesus chose to share table fellowship with, with people that they regarded as outcasts.

[ 12 : 56 ] These sinners, in their view, not only broke the moral laws, but also the Lord's regarding purity as well. Jesus, therefore, tells them these three parables.

This is the context. The lost sheep. The lost sheep is hopelessly lost. In the first parable, it's very clear that Jesus aligns the shepherd in the story with God.

These Pharisees and scribes would have been familiar with the book of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 40, verse 11. We read, He will tend his flock like a shepherd.

He will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them to his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. The Bible makes numerous mentions. It's a good study to do, actually.

Numerous mentions of God and the Lord Jesus Christ as shepherds. Good shepherds. Great shepherd. Peter describes those who God has rescued, who have been saved in the following way.

[ 14 : 06 ] For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2, 25. Does that describe you this morning?

In first century Palestine, shepherds together with camel drivers, sailors, sailors, gamblers with dice, dyers, tax collectors and prostitutes, were all regarded as thieves and hirelings.

Therefore, casting God in the role of shepherd would have shocked the Pharisees. Jesus, in accepting and eating with sinners, reflects God's gracious spirit towards those who were held in contempt by the Pharisees.

The Pharisees' self-righteousness becomes the barrier of grace and to grace. For the Pharisees, these people have to merit the grace of God.

We've already said that the lost sheep could not find its own way home. So the shepherd leaves the 99 and goes in search of the one lost sheep.

[ 15 : 18 ] And as stated before, God takes the initiative to find his own. Jesus is the revelation of how far God goes in seeking his misplaced, wondered children.

There's a wonderful picture here in this story of the good shepherd, joyfully putting his lost sheep on his shoulders and carrying it home.

There are those who perhaps we know who were once part of God's family, part of God's flock, but who for various reasons have wandered away and seemed to be lost.

Do we, should we, continue to pray for them and to love them? Absolutely, we should. We need to be God's feet and eyes and ears and hands to encourage them back to him.

We can all think of folks who we once shared fellowship with who we no longer see. We should, if possible, arrange to meet them, to seek them out, to listen to them and to offer help in any way we can as a demonstration of God's love to them.

[ 16 : 38 ] Always remembering that their battle is often a spiritual battle, so prayer is essential. In contrast to the murmurings of the Pharisees, Jesus states in verse 7, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

Now I've often wondered about this verse because the Bible tells us, Paul tells us, that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There are no righteous.

And so this saying of Jesus must be an ironic saying. At best this morning, we're all sinners, mercifully saved by the grace of God.

Grace being God's unmerited favor. We do not merit our salvation. At best this morning, we are sinners, mercifully saved by the grace of God.

Grace being God's unmerited favor. So what about the woman with the lost coin? The coin's helplessly lost. We saw that the wee figure from the doll could not find itself.

[ 17 : 59 ] The children had to go and find the lost figure from the Ukrainian doll. The parable features a poor woman with ten coins, ten silver coins.

The point of the parable would be lost if the coins were of great worth to anyone other than herself. The lost coin forms part of this woman's small savings or dowry and is therefore very precious to her.

So she searches tirelessly before accepting that this coin is truly lost. This woman's home would probably have been very simple. It would probably have had a dirt floor, no windows, and a small door.

hence the need to light a lamp as she sweeps and searches carefully for the coin. There are millions of people in our world today who are hopelessly lost.

They've never heard about Jesus. I pray that we might play our part in either actively supporting those in the mission field or go ourselves bearing in mind that the mission field is not some far away place.

[ 19 : 17 ] The mission field is just outside those doors. So may God by His Holy Spirit give us a real burden for those who have yet to hear the glorious gospel.

Neither the sheep nor the sheep can repent. So the point of these stories is not the calling of sinners to repentance but rather the calling of the righteous to join in the search for them and then celebrating when those who are lost are found.

Whether we will join in the celebration is the all-important factor because it reveals whether our relationships, our relationship with God is based on merit or mercy.

And we're going to consider that in more detail this evening. Those who find God's mercy offensive cannot celebrate with the angels when sinners are found.

Thus they exclude themselves from God's grace. And then we come to the lost son. Very, very familiar story. Commentaries describe this story as a two-peaked parable.

[ 20 : 30 ] It's also described as a gem of a parable because it is multifaceted. The story hinges around a man who had two sons, verse 11.

The parable is about the father's relationship with each of his sons. The compassionate father and the angry brother contrast two ways of receiving back into family.

Or in our case back into fellowship those who are lost. There are three characters in the story. The prodigal son who chooses to be hedonistically lost.

The waiting father and the elder son. This morning we're concentrating on the father and the prodigal but it's important to notice when we read this parable that the father loved both of his sons equally.

the parable can be seen in two parts. The father's response to the younger son and the father's response to the older son. That's the two peaks of the parable. This parable complements and extends the first two parables of lostness that Jesus told.

[ 21 : 46 ] And this morning we're concentrating on the younger son and the father. Prodigal that's an interesting word isn't it? This son requests his share of his father's estate we read.

This apparently was not disrespectful or irregular at the time but in asking for his share of his father's estate he's treating his father as if he were already dead.

This is what he would have inherited had his father died. So he the father divided his property between his sons. Verse 11 The Greek word used for property is the same word used for life so the verse could read so the father divided his life between them.

This father clearly loves both his sons. How hurt must he have been when the younger asked for his inheritance. By taking his inheritance early the younger son gives up any right to further claim to his father's estate.

Someone said to me this week wherever there's a will there's a relative quick to get their hands on what they think is there.

[ 23 : 14 ] And this can only be described as greed to get their hands on. My father died but before he died when my grandfather died.

My grandfather used to be a farmer as I know many of you are. And over years his father was the farm was eaten away by compulsory purchase so the local authority purchased my granddad's fields to build more and more houses.

In fact when you drive from Hawbury to Wakefield now there's no gap at all. There are no fields. It's just a big conurbation of houses and so on. But my grandfather kept hold of one field and when he died the majority of his property was given to my auntie.

Because my dad like with most people didn't have a great relationship with his father as well. And so the only thing that would have been left to the family was this field.

And then one of my younger brothers, as I said before I've got five brothers, one of my younger brothers went to my father, made him an offer and bought the field off him for ten thousand pounds.

[ 24 : 37 ] And so when my father died, well then he came and told us, told the rest of the family that he'd bought this field off my dad. And this field is in an area between Hawberry and Osset, so it's green belt at the moment.

But it's very probable that that land will eventually be developed for housing, which would make that field very valuable. Indeed, and besides which, it was our inheritance, it was the inheritance for us all.

And so for this brother to go and buy this field has caused a lot of problems in the family. And there was no other reason for it than greed. And how hurt.

I just felt hurt that a brother would go and preempt my father's death by buying the field.

And so, you know, that's just a real example of what still happens today. And sadly, we usually learn to demand our rights before we learn to value our relationships.

[ 25 : 40 ] And that's what's happened here. The youngest son was acting within his rights, but was at risk of destroying his closest relationships in the process.

He would never have another family, another father. Most of us are familiar with the story. The youngest son leaves for a distant land or a far country and squanders all his money on loose living, which speaks about debauch luxury, drunkenness, immorality, and lawless idolatry.

In other words, he adopted a totally hedonistic lifestyle. The word prodigal means using resources recklessly, spending money wastefully and extravagantly.

Whilst I was a minister in Fort William Baptist Church, I remember that at a prayer meeting when someone was praying about those who used to belong to the fellowship, but for whatever reason that stopped coming, they would describe them as being in a distant land.

And that's what this young man does. He goes away to a far country, to a distant land. And pleasure becomes the prodigal son's God. He behaves in a totally individualistic way, which in our increasingly secular society is the way that most people, especially young people, behave today.

[ 27 : 01 ] They believe that everything revolves surround themselves. I will do what I want. My identity comes first. Nobody has the right to challenge my choices, or the way I feel, or the way I live.

And more often than not, what I have is who I am. I am what I have. I'm defined by the stuff I own, the branded clothes that I wear, and even have the right to choose which gender I want to be.

So from the perspective of self-centered individual, this is all fine. It's all fine until things begin to go wrong. Then who do you blame?

How desperately sad when consequently the only answer for these people is themselves. because for these folks, there is no bigger story.

There is no God. The Bible is not relevant. That's just hopeless. This, I believe, is to be at the root of a lot of the addictions and self-harm that we see, especially amongst young people.

[ 28 : 19 ] See, no doubt while the youngest son had money, he would have had lots of friends. But we read that a severe famine comes upon the land. The famine mentioned in verse 14, merely hastens this young man's demise.

The way he was living was not sustainable. His demise is such that this Jewish young man ends up feeding pigs.

Now we probably already know, but pigs were seen as unclean and untouchable as far as Jews were concerned. And yet he sunk so low that he even desires to eat the food the pigs are eating.

It is in the depravity and mire of this pig pen that we're told that this young man comes to his senses. And this is the turning point in the story and speaks about our human capacity to renounce foolish error and to reclaim our former potential.

people. The prodigal reasons that even if his father would not allow him back as a son, perhaps he would hire him as a servant, which would mean that at least he would have enough food to eat and clothes to wear.

[ 29 : 39 ] The text, however, speaks about his desire for repentance and he prepares a speech which includes confession, contrition and petition.

So look at what he says. Confession. Father, I have sinned against heaven. So he recognized that first of all he sinned against God and then he sinned against his father and against you.

Contrition. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. And then petition. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

What about the father? I believe that few other portraits in scripture come close to describing the character of God than this waiting father.

He's pictured peering down the road, longing for his son to return. And then once he sees him, he springs to his feet and he runs to meet him. This actively represents God's grace.

[ 30 : 49 ] In those days it was thought undignified for a middle-aged older man to run. But the father sweeps up all his garments and he's moved with compassion.

He runs to meet this prodigal son. son. As they meet, the father embraces him and kisses him.

The prodigal son immediately starts into his rehearsed speech. But before he can ask if he can be received back as a servant, the father interrupts him and said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and kill it and let's eat and celebrate.

For this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. Like the lost sheep and the lost coin, the lost son is found, resulting in great celebration, rejoicing in heaven in the presence of the angels.

This son has been literally propped from the slimy pit, from the mud and the mire and he's been given a firm place to stand as we sang earlier.

[ 32 : 11 ] Praise God if that's your experience today. The father in this parable is a picture of God's joy in receiving a sinner coming home.

This I believe gives us the assurance of God's love to those who face illness and death and who are perhaps wondering how will God receive you.

If we and the opportunities we have turn from our sin, repent of our sin, get down on our knees before God and ask him to forgive us, God will forgive.

God will accept in and through what the Lord Jesus said for each one of us. sinners. Because in the end we'll all return home as sinners who through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus are welcomed into eternal glory.

We can be assured this morning that God's goodness and mercy will be at least as great as that of the human loving father in this story that Jesus told.

[ 33 : 18 ] So I'd like us to finish our time this morning together by focusing on the cross of Christ. On the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, after instituting the Lord's Supper, he together with his disciples went to the garden of Gethsemane.

This was a place that Jesus had visited often before. And there Jesus prayed, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done. An angel from heaven strengthened him and being in agony, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.

It's important, it's lest we lose sight of the cost of our salvation, it's good to remember the anticipatory agony of Gethsemane.

One commentator wrote that the cross was not a three hour inconvenience for Jesus. He meant that he entered into the infant abyss of sin and curse.

[ 34 : 33 ] He became a curse for us. All hell was distilled in that cup of suffering. And for the sinless Son of God, the Lord Jesus, it was no more bearable than it would have been for ourselves.

In fact, it was infinitely worse. How terrible is the God forsakenness of the cross and the cry of dereliction uttered by our Lord.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? all of this was necessary so that by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, having repented of our sins, we might know that our sins are forgiven and we can call God our heavenly Father, Abba, Daddy, Abba, Father.

What a wonderful privilege to call the God of creation, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Abba, Father. So having been welcomed home ourselves by the loving and gracious, by a loving and gracious God and having received forgiveness in and through the sacrifice of our Lord, may we in turn offer the same love, grace and forgiveness to others.

remembering to share this amazing love and grace with those who are yet outside the family of God.

[ 36 : 12 ] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your extraordinary love for each one of us. We thank you that you seek and save those who are lost and that we're saved by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we thank you, Lord, that our Lord is risen and even now is interceding before your throne of grace for sinners like ourselves. Help us to know personally, individually, your great love for us today.

In Jesus' name. Amen. ■■■ the angel of mercy who Jackie come to the church ■ of the love for me and indicial to the King ■ Satan behold with us in you he known he man