

# Lost and Found

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[ 0 : 00 ] From his childhood in London, John Newton was an unsavory character. Often in trouble with the law, in 1744, he found himself pressed ganged into the Royal Navy, where he served in the East Indies.

He made his escape and became a slave trader in modern-day Sierra Leone. He returned to England in 1746.

On his journey home, Newton began to read Thomas Akempis' famous book, *The Imitation of Christ*. On that journey, his ship was caught in a vicious storm, and Newton cried out to God for mercy.

The storm abated, and he returned safely home. For the next five years, John Newton continued to serve on ships, transporting slaves across the Atlantic.

But on one time at home in Liverpool, he met with the famous Christian preachers George Whitefield and John Wesley. Through their witness to him, John Newton became a Christian.

[ 1 : 09 ] He turned his back on the slave trade, and along with William Wilberforce, the great Christian, became influential in the movement to abolish slavery in Great Britain.

He then went on to become a minister in the Church of England. It's a fascinating story about the change becoming a Christian can make in someone's life.

But what John Newton is most famous for is a hymn he wrote on New Year's Day, 1773, the most famous hymn in the world. As he looked back on all those years of criminality and slave trading, Newton realized he had been lost.

But when he became a Christian, he had been found. He had been blind, but now he could see. What a change comes about in a person when they become a Christian.

It may not always be something easy to see. After all, few of us were as unsavory characters as was John Newton. But it's what we can't see that really changes.

[ 2 : 35 ] Once we were totally lost to God, but now he has found us, and in him we belong and are safe.

Well, Luke 15 begins with the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel, and they're criticizing Jesus for associating with tax collectors and sinners.

They hated the thought that a righteous Jew should have anything to do with such disreputable and immoral people. Jesus, hearing their grumbling, tells three parables, the common theme of which is lost and found.

Something is found that once was lost. So, in verse 1 to 7, it's a sheep. In verses 8 through 10, it's a coin.

And in verses 11 through 32, it's a son. John Newton could identify with being that lost sheep, that lost coin, that lost son.

[ 3 : 41 ] For all those years he lived an evil life. Without God, he was lost. But like that lost sheep, coin, and son, God found him, and God rescued him.

These tax collectors and sinners, rather like Newton, were lost. But Jesus had come to find them and bring them home. Now, this morning I want us to see three things from the first two parables in verses 1 to 10.

Three very basic things. We are lost. Jesus found us. There is joy in heaven. We are lost. Jesus found us. There is joy in heaven. There may be no John Newtons here today. But nevertheless, you know without Jesus, we're all lost.

It takes his amazing grace to find us and bring us home to himself. First of all then, we are lost.

[ 4 : 47 ] We are lost. In the first parable, out of a hundred sheep, one is lost. Now, some say that sheep are very intelligent animals, but I'd have to say, not in my experience.

The sheep was lost in the wilderness, a wilderness filled with, at that time, predators, thieves. It was dry with little to feed the sheep or for them to drink.

The wilderness contained sharp rocks, cliffs, deep pits. It was a dangerous place for a lone sheep. The sheep is lost.

Without its companions, it doesn't know what it is or where it is to go next. Now, we've all seen many a lost sheep in our time.

Christmas, up in Kathmer's home village, one of her brother's sheep escaped from the field and we saw it on the road late at night. It didn't know the danger it was in from all the passing cars doing the North Coast 500.

[ 5 : 52 ] Now, we've seen in our time sheep teetering on high cliffs, stuck in peat bogs, turned on their backs. You know, a sheep on its back can't bite itself.

You know, it's in the nature of sheep to get lost. It's what they do. And this sheep, in Luke 15, was as lost as it's possible for a lost sheep to be lost.

In the second parable, out of ten coins, one is lost. Now, the coin referred to was worth about a day's wages, a large amount in the Israel of Jesus' day.

Houses then had tiny little windows, no glass, so they were very dark. It was very difficult to see small things like coins.

Where could such a valuable item have disappeared to? Could it be under the table, under a couch, under a chair? Could it be stuck in a crack in the wall? Could it have been stolen by a thief?

[ 6 : 53 ] Whatever it was, it was a large amount of money to lose. It, being one of ten coins, may signify it was given as a necklace, as part of a marriage dowry.

It would be like losing one's expensive engagement ring, perhaps worth thousands of pounds. And that coin's in a dark house. It could be anywhere in that dark house.

When I was a boy, I remember my father losing his wallet and going frantic at us all. We lived in a big house, big garden, and my father couldn't remember where he'd last seen his wallet.

Could it be in the house somewhere? Had he dropped it in the garden? Had it fallen out of his pocket in the car? Or had a thief come and stolen it? He got us to spend the whole day searching for it, me and my two brothers.

And all because, like that lost coin, it was as lost as it was possible for a lost wallet to be lost. Now, in the context of the parables, of course, the lost sheep and the lost coin represent the tax collectors and the sinners with whom Jesus is associating and eating.

[ 8 : 09 ] They are lost. They are lost to the Jewish religion because they live immoral and irreligious lives. They're not pure enough to attend the temple. They wouldn't be welcomed there anyway.

They're not respectable enough. They are lost to their families. They have disappointed everyone who loved them and cared for them. The tax collectors, well, they work for the Roman enemies. They're collaborators. The sinners are most likely prostitutes. They are lost to themselves. For all their ill-gotten gains, they know their lives lack meaning and they are filled with guilt and shame and loneliness.

And most important of all, they are lost to God. Because they know that by virtue of their life choices, they have chosen to be far away from Him.

The woman on Union Street looks like she's 70 years old. Her face is wrinkled.

[ 9 : 15 ] Her hair is matted. Her teeth are yellow and black. And her eyes are empty. But in reality, she's only in her mid-30s.

It is drink, drugs, poverty and sexual promiscuity which has made her look so old and so dirty. The man is executive level busy.

He did have a wife and children but lost them because he spent so much time furthering his important career. He once lived in a big brownstone house in the West End in Highland.

But now lives alone in a one-bedroom flat on Suckyhall Street. He's got no real friends. He spends most of his days in the office and most of his nights alone in the flat working till all hours on his computer.

And on a Saturday night, he goes out on the town looking to score a one-night stand with an unsuspecting married woman. They are lost.

[ 10 : 25 ] Lost. They are both lost. The tax collectors and sinners knew that they were lost. The Pharisees and scribes, those looking down their noses at the old unfortunates, they were entirely as lost as everyone else.

They just didn't know it. They were lost in a maze of religious expectations. Lost in the darkness of self-righteousness and hidden guilt. Hugh McKenna, one of the wisest men I ever knew, used to say to me, there are two types of people, he would say.

Down and outs and up and outs. But they have one thing in common. They are both out. By nature, which of these two do you most freely associate with?

With the down and out who looks like she's 70, but really she's in her mid-30s? Or with the man whose career is flying? The thing is, they're both lost because ultimately they're lost to God.

God reckons no one in their thinking. For the woman, it's where to score the next drink or the next hit. For the man, it's where to get the next business deal or where to find the next one-night stand.

[ 11 : 43 ] Their sin has separated them from God. They are without God and without hope in the world. The bare truth is that by nature, all of us are lost to God because of our sin.

All of us. The bare truth is that we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That we're all like that lost sheep and that lost coin. That we don't know God.

We don't belong to God. And we're not safe in this world. And sometimes that knowledge breaks through. Often in the middle of the night when we wake up. And we feel like we're going mad.

But most of the time, we manage to suppress that knowledge of us being lost to God. And just get on with life like everybody else. But it doesn't change the fact we are lost to God.

We're as lost as it's possible as a lost person to be lost. John Newton was lost on a slaving ship.

But we may be lost on Union Street or on a one-bedroom flat on Socky Hall Street.

[ 12 : 51 ] We're lost. We're all lost. Second, Jesus found us. Jesus found us. You know, there are a few more beautiful pictures of Jesus' life mission than that we're presented with in the parable of the lost sheep.

There he is, that shepherd, who goes after that one lost sheep and keeps searching until he finds it. He will not give up until he's found that one sheep and has it over his shoulders.

It's just one sheep out of a hundred, but it's lost. If it was us, would we have risked ourselves by going out into the dangerous wilderness to find that one lost sheep out of a hundred, or would we have cut our losses and wrote the sheep off?

But such is the loving determination of the shepherd. He keeps looking until he finds it. He goes after it. By its own stupidity, that sheep had got itself lost.

It had wandered from the rest of the flock. But the loving determination of the shepherd is greater than the stupidity of his sheep. He may be lost to that sheep, but that sheep is not lost to him.

[ 14 : 11 ] John Newton was but one man caught out on that boat in a stormy sea. There were hundreds of others on that boat, but out of them all, Jesus was searching for him.

That sheep which Catherine and I saw on the road up north at Christmas belonged to my brother-in-law. And even though it was a very stormy night, he went searching for it until he found it. He has another 60 sheep, perhaps even more. But he would not write this one sheep off. He found it. And he brought it to safety. Don't you know that today Jesus is searching for those who are lost? He is searching for the modern-day equivalent of the tax collector and the sinner, those on the outside of respectability, those whose lives are a mess on the inside even if they are all together on the outside.

He is searching for those who are lost to God, lost to others, and lost to themselves. He is searching for you. And such is his loving determination, he will not stop until he has found you, until he has laid you on his shoulders and brought you to God.

[ 15 : 28 ] You have made stupid decisions and that's why you were lost. But Jesus' love is greater than our stupidity. Well, then the coin was lost.

Who knows how it got lost? Who knows what it is? But the woman of the house lights lamps to make the house brighter and she sweeps the house clean. And as we read, she seeks diligently until she has found it.

She's so careful to look in every nook and cranny of that house. She looks underneath every piece of furniture. She's so diligent. She's so careful until she finds it.

You know, me and my brothers, we looked for my dad's wallet all day. The whole family looked everywhere. In the fridge, in the bin, great place to look for lost things, a bin. Isn't that right, Catherine? We finally found it down the side of his seat in the car.

But we weren't allowed to give up until we found his wallet. Don't you think it's such a wonderfully pregnant phrase in verse 8? Until she finds it.

[ 16 : 38 ] Until she finds it. Jesus keeps searching until he finds those who are lost. A few chapters later on in chapter 19, verse 10 at this rate, we'll get there in 2030.

Jesus finds a tax collector called Zacchaeus hiding up a sycamore tree. And he says, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

The mission of Jesus from beginning to end was to search for the lost, the tax collectors and the sinners the Pharisees so hated. He searched for those who didn't want to be found.

One of my favorite pieces of music at the moment is a classical piece written by the great Sir Carl Jenkins. It's a translation from ancient Aramaic, the language which Jesus would have spoken. And it's called Are You Lost Out in Darkness? Are you lost out in darkness? Imagine being lost out in darkness.

[ 17 : 51 ] Imagine the darkness of the darkest night and you're lost. It's so very dark and you're lost. And you're disoriented. And you're haunted.

And you're deathly scared. But then out of nowhere Jesus appears in all the light of His beauty. And His hand extends to us leading us to safety. That woman who lives on the streets and looks like she's 70.

That man who's lost his family and lives a meaningless life. They are lost lost in the darkness of life's misery. Their greatest need is to be found by Jesus.

If they remain in the darkness of this life, without Jesus they'll spend eternity in the darkness of the next. But at that very point a Christian gently speaks to that woman and invites her to come to an addiction recovery group.

[ 18 : 56 ] Against all her friends' advice she goes. And over the course of a few weeks she hears the good news of a Jesus who loves her just as she is.

she puts her faith in him and though life continues to be tough for her and her addiction is very difficult to kick it is all beginning to make sense.

Just at that point where the man can't go down any lower while flicking through the channels in his DAB radio he comes across a Christian radio station UCB radio.

He listens. He hears the Bible being read and explained. He hears Christian songs. He hears the joy in the presenters' voices and shortly afterwards he phones their helpline to confess how hopeless empty and meaningless his life really is.

He becomes a Christian. He joins a church and begins to get his life back together again. Jesus went searching for lost sheep through his servants sharing the good news of the gospel one on the street one on the radio.

[ 20 : 13 ] He found them and laying them on his shoulders he brought them home to God. He swept the house and through his servants speaking to strangers about him he diligently searched until he found them.

By receiving sinners and eating with them Jesus is searching for the lost. Through the preaching of the gospel in this church and many other churches throughout our city the living Christ is searching for you.

He is lifting the lost sheep onto his shoulders. He's picking up that lost coin. He is looking for you today. Perhaps for all these years you've not wanted to be found by him but today to the Holy Spirit's conviction you know he's found you at last.

Jesus found John Newton on an 18th century ship bound for England. he's found you today in Crow Road Free Church of Scotland and his message is I've come to bring you home.

Our last point today briefly there is joy in heaven. There is joy in heaven. There was a saying a Jewish saying very famous at the time of Jesus' life.

[ 21 : 27 ] Listen to it. There is joy before God when those who provoke him perish from this world. There is joy before God when those who provoke him perish from this world.

For the Pharisees all heaven exalts with joy when the unrighteous in this world perish. For Jesus from this passage the deeper truth was the exact opposite.

there is joy before God when those who provoke him are saved. There is joy before God when those who provoke him are saved.

What strikes us about these two parables is the disproportionate amount of joy there seems to be in response to that which was lost being found.

So, the lost sheep is found. It happens every single day in the Scottish countryside. My brother in law found his lost sheep on the road a mile away from his house, but he did not call together all his

friends and all his neighbors and throw a party and say to them, rejoice with me, for I found a sheep that was walking in the road.

[ 22 : 43 ] Coins, precious things, keys to one's house, mobile phones on Monroe's are things lost every day, never mind anyone else's. We found my father's lost wallet in his car, but he didn't gather together all his friends and all his neighbors and throw a party and say to them, rejoice with me, I've just found my wallet.

The joy of finding here in these parables is way beyond what we would expect it to be, way beyond. Jesus applies this, he says, just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who depends than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

And just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who depends. These tax collectors, these sinners, over their repentance, there is a disproportionate joy in heaven.

They have been found and the whole host of heaven, God included, rejoices triumphantly. They were lost and heaven rejoices in finding them.

God's greatest joy, if I may use words like that, is found in lost sinners returning to him, the supreme display of his amazing grace.

[ 24 : 12 ] The angels gasp in wonder as broken human beings lost in sin and guilt are transformed by the grace of God into beloved children who bear his image more clearly than they ever could.

Their wonder turns into the praise of the God whose glory is more clearly seen in the salvation of a lost woman on Union Street who looks 70 but really 30, or a lost executive who can't go through the night without working on his computer.

Their wonder turns into praise of the God whose glory is more clearly seen in their salvation than in the creation of all the stars and all the planets in the universe.

The heavens burst into song and all because here on earth a former druggie believed in Jesus and a former work addict committed himself to living not for career but for Christ.

The parable teaches us there is joy before God when those who provoke him are saved. You see these shoulders on which these lost sheep were carried home were the shoulders of Jesus himself stretched out on the cross as he bore the sins of a guilty world.

[ 25 : 33 ] And that wood from which that broom which swept the house clean was made in search of that lost coin was the same wood from which the cross on which Jesus was crucified was made.

Jesus the Lord the teller of these parables gave himself on the cross destroying the record of guilt which stood against us.

Dying to take away the ugly sins of John Newton. Dying to take away the sins of the addict. Dying to take away the sins of the promiscuous and the selfish.

Dying to take away the sins of the socially respectable. Dying to take away my sins. Dying to take away yours. By our sins we have strayed very far from God but by his sacrifice he has found us.

Well let me briefly close by applying this text in two directions. The first is this. Go looking for tax collectors and sinners.

[ 26 : 40 ] Go looking for them. Those who are far away from God. Don't make any assumptions about them. They will often know far better than you how lost they are and more ready to hear the word of the gospel of how on the cross Jesus finds sinners.

Remember the joy of heaven over the repentance of just one sinner. Bring heaven joy. Be that shepherd with his sheep draped over its shoulders.

be that woman sweeping the house until she finds her precious coin. Be the shoulders and the broom of Jesus as he goes out to seek and save the lost. Secondly, there are perhaps those among us today who know that they are lost out in the darkness.

For all that you may have it together on the outside, your career is great. Your relationships are good. and you look the picture of health.

You know on the inside you're that lost sheep, that lost coin far away from God. My dear friend, be found by the gospel today.

[ 27 : 53 ] Recognize the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ and how it is there and there alone you'll be found because then having trusted and believed in Jesus, you'll be able to sing joyfully from your heart along with all the people of God.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.