

God seeks and saves the lost

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Preacher: Paul Woodward

[0:00] Good morning. I will try not to scare anyone with my voice.

! It does happen from time to time. So no promises, but I will do my best. I remember where I was at September 11, 2001, and I'm sure most of us in this room who were alive that day still remember. It was a day of great sadness, profound sadness, anger, lots of emotions.

I remember I was in the Navy at the time. I'm retired military, by the way. I worked the 3 to 11 shift at Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 2 in Norfolk, Virginia.

I was preparing my day, drinking my coffee, ironing my uniform, going throughout my typical morning routine. Had the news on just in the background.

[1:18] And I heard about this smoke coming out of one of the buildings at the World Trade Center.

And so it got my attention. And I paid close attention to the television set as I watched the camera show another plane at the time that I looked up strike into the second building.

And I knew instantly what was going on. It was a terrorist attack. We were under attack in our own country.

A little while later, I received a phone call. I worked the 3 to 11 shift. They said, everybody come in. Got ready.

Started driving to work. It was typically about a 20 minute drive, which is quite good in Norfolk if you've ever been there. However, because they called in the entire base, traffic was backed up five miles into the main gate.

[2:26] We're calling people, telling them, hey, traffic's backed up. We can't get there. We can't get there. They're like, park your car and walk. So many of us walked onto base that day.

We gathered around the television. We watched what was going on. Lots of feelings amongst all of us. But I remember the feeling of people coming out of that building.

Survivors of this great catastrophe who were found in the building by heroic firefighters and EMTs and police officers and our neighbors.

Pulling people out of that building before it collapsed. I also remember seeing people on floors that I can't even number that high because I'm from eastern Kentucky.

Jumping to their deaths to get away from the heat and the extraordinary fire and smoke. We all remember it was an intense scene.

[3:34] But the joy of those people who came out, who survived that catastrophe before the buildings collapsed. The joy of finding even one person alive.

We all felt that joy. We all felt that joy. Even through our anger, through our sadness, through all of the emotion. We felt the joy of people who were found and brought out from certain death.

Our gospel reading this morning in Luke chapter 15 is about joy. It is about the joy of God finding His people.

Sinners who could go to their certain death. But there is joy in God finding His people.

We have three parables in this chapter. Two of which we will cover today. One, Father I'll probably cover next week.

[4:39] So I'm the front man for the band. He's the main guy. I'm just here to prep everybody. But these two parables are of the utmost importance.

Jesus often taught in parables and He tells so much in these stories that sometimes we wouldn't get it if He just came right out and said it. It makes us think.

It makes us meditate on the Scripture. It makes us wonder what is it that Jesus is talking about. And it's very easy to read these parables and say, okay, this is an evangelical sermon.

It is about going out and spreading the gospel. And to a point, it is. It's about repentance. It's about repentance.

And it's also about reconciliation. I'm a former Baptist, so alliteration is something we do. Okay? A recovering Baptist. In chapter 14, at the very conclusion of the chapter, Luke writes these words. [5:57] He says, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. Today, he who has ears to hear, let him hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We get into chapter 15, and we read, now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming close to Him to hear Him.

And immediately, it contrasts that with the Pharisees and the scribes who grumble because Jesus is hanging out with sinners and tax collectors.

Last week, Father Ife told us there were huge crowds gathering around Jesus. Now we kind of zoom in a bit, and we see who it is that are in these crowds.

We have tax collectors and sinners as our opening act. Tax collectors were despised by first century Jews in Palestine.

[7:08] They worked for the Romans. They collected taxes from their neighbors. They were spies, oftentimes, for the Romans, who would tell the government officials, who is not paying their taxes, who is doing what, sneaking around, making extra money on the side, doing whatever they can.

They were despised by their neighbors. Then you have sinners. Now, we are all sinners, right?

We are all born sinners. We live our lives as sinners. And in a sense, this is referring to that type of sin.

But more specifically here, Luke is writing about what a sinner was considered in the first century around Judea. And a sinner at this time, and because it's contrasted with the Pharisees, we know that these sinners are people who are ritually unclean.

These are people that don't do their sacrifices properly. They don't make their pilgrimage to the temple. These are some of the people that we see in this parable.

[8:25] Sheep herders, shepherds. They don't leave their sheep on a Sabbath so that they can go make a sacrifice. So they were considered unclean people.

They were also sinners who were pagans. Romans. People who did not believe in Yahweh, the one and only God.

These were the people that Luke is talking about here. But these people were drawing close to Jesus to listen to him. To listen to him teach.

To listen to him love his neighbor as himself. We see that next that Luke writes about the Pharisees and the scribes.

Now, Jesus often throughout the Gospels picks on the Pharisees and scribes. Rightfully so. But we also look at them often as the bad guys in these stories.

[9:25] They're not necessarily the bad guys. They really aren't. They don't understand the ministry of Jesus. These are religious people though.

They consider themselves to be righteous people. To be justified people. To Yahweh. They don't consider themselves to be sinners.

Because they're righteous. Pharisees were just one sect of the Jewish religion at the time. There were more people than just the Pharisees and the scribes.

Sometimes we read about the Sadducees. There are also others called the Essenes. There are people who live in the community of Qumran. In the wilderness. Outside of Jerusalem.

So there are several types of Jews. Pharisees were, for the most part, lay people. They weren't priests. Although some were.

[10:21] Typically they were not. They were lay scholars. These were people who knew the law of Moses. They were experts in the Jewish Torah.

The first five books of Moses. And the prophets. And the writings. These were people who were oftentimes lawyers. They were legal experts.

They were people who knew what the law said. And were there to make sure that the Jewish people followed the law of Moses. Because they were to remain faithful to the covenant that God had made with his people.

You see. You see. Even with these people that we have mentioned right here. Jesus is speaking to Jewish people.

The people of God. The chosen people of God. These are people who God picked among all the nations of the earth.

[11:20] They were. To share his love with the whole world. But they messed up. They messed up.

And they're wandering away from the teachings of Moses. They're wandering away from the teachings of the prophets. They wander away from the writings. Of the Old Testament scholars. And scribes. Righteous people. You see. Jesus is talking about here too. Because they too are sinners. There are no righteous people.

No. Not one. Paul writes. But Jesus tells these folks about a parable. About first. A shepherd. And a lost sheep. There are a hundred sheep in this story. And one goes astray. If you notice in chapter 15 here as we read on.

[12:23] There's a progression. There's one of a hundred. Then there's one of ten. Then there's one of two. From next time. The prodigal son story. So we've got. One percent.

Ten percent. And fifty percent. For all you mathematicians of which I am not one. But it's progressive. In his. In his storytelling. To make a point.

He also contrasts. We've already seen the contrast. Between the tax collectors and sinners. And the Pharisees and the scribes. There's a contrast. About a man.

And a woman. There are all kinds of contrasts. That Luke's writing here. So that people can remember this. And it gets their attention. So he told them this parable. He gives us the three. In Matthew 18. When he talks about the parable of the lost sheep. It's. There are a little. Nuanced. Change here and there.

[13:20] But it's still the same parable. There are a hundred sheep. One. Goes astray. But the shepherd. Leaves. The ninety nine. Now. How much sense does that make to us?

Let's say we're on a picnic table. And we've got a hundred dollars on the table. And we've got it laid out. Nice and pretty. Because we're admiring our hundred dollars. And the wind comes along. And blows one away. Are we going to leave ninety nine in the wind. To chase one dollar? It doesn't make sense economically. But you know what? The kingdom of Jesus. Doesn't always make sense to us.

It's an upside down kingdom. Where the least are the first. And the first are the last. It's a kingdom where the king. Is a slave in the flesh.

When he condescends himself. And steps down from his throne in heaven. To walk amongst his people. It's an upside down kingdom. But Jesus has proclaimed throughout the gospel.

[14:21] That the kingdom of God has come. He is instituting his kingdom. That is the essence of the gospel. The king is here. And that's why there's rejoicing.

But this sheep is lost. The shepherd here. Is a picture of God. His sheep have gone astray at times. That's why Jesus came to the Jews.

They have gone astray. Since early on they broke the covenant. Before Moses even came down from the mountain. The sheep were going astray. He brings the law to them.

And they've already broken the law. How often in our lives do we go astray? Even members of the church.

Being the people of God. We sin. Part of our service. We confess our sin. And we seek forgiveness. Through repentance. The message that Jesus preached throughout the gospel.

[15:25] Was to repent. Repent. He says. For the kingdom of God has come. Repent. Turn around. Turn back.

In essence. These are Jews. They are already the people of God. God. We talk about the Jews. As if they think that they believe in salvation.

By works. And that's not always really correct. The Jews were already saved by grace. That has never changed in the scripture. Never.

It has always been by grace. And God reminds the people. Even in the Old Testament. Of salvation by grace alone. Through faith alone. In him alone.

God. When Moses writes. Over and over. In the Pentateuch. In Deuteronomy particularly. But also in Exodus. In Leviticus. In Numbers. It says.

[16:21] I am Yahweh. The Lord your God. Who brought you out of the land of Egypt. In your bondage and slavery. And then he gives them the law.

He already saved his people. Through his grace. Through his mercy. Did that mean that every Israelite.

In ancient Israel was saved. Like we think of salvation. No. No. They still sin. And we see it. Over and over and over again. In fact. They sin so much.

They broke the covenant. God finally put his foot down. And said. You know what? You broke the covenant. I told you what would happen. If you broke the covenant. You're going into exile. So the northern kingdom of Israel.

Went into exile. With the Assyrians. As they marched into the country. And they went into Samaria. And they took the Israelites. And they brought them out of there. And they spread them across.

[17 : 18] The known world. They made them into slaves. They took families. And they broke them apart. It was miserable. They couldn't practice their religion.

As if they were practicing it anyway. In many cases. But some did. There was always a remnant of people. That God has had. A remnant of true believers.

Who received his salvation. Through faith. So now you've got the southern kingdom. That are still keeping up appearances. For the most part. In Judah.

And they have a couple of good kings. About four in total. Of all over a few hundred years. And yet they continue to break the covenant. So God says.

You know what? I'm going to put my foot down again. The armies of Babylon. Come in. Because they've taken over. From the Assyrians. And they take. The. They storm into Jerusalem. And they take the people of Judah.

[18 : 14] And they put them into captivity. And slavery. It's as if the Jews are in Israel again. Or I'm sorry. I'm sorry. In Egypt again. These are the people that Jesus is talking to here.

People who have experienced sin. And exile. Judgment. For what they have done. To break God's covenant. For what they have done. But Jesus comes with a message of hope.

He says that the shepherd seeks. Even the one sheep. Who goes astray. Because that's how much the shepherd cares. And loves his flock.

You think. Okay. Well he leaves the ninety nine. And they're in good hands. Not once in this passage. We assume. But not once does it say. That there's another shepherd. Watching the other sheep. In fact.

The word. For where they are. Is the word for wilderness. Desert. It's the same word. Used in the Old Testament. When Moses. And the people. Are wandering. Through the wilderness.

[19 : 20] That's where. The other ninety nine. Are left. But God. Cares. So much. For even. One. All of us.

God cares about. He knows you. He knows me. Intimately. I love. In this story. When the. When the. Shepherd goes out.

And he. He gathers up the one. And he puts him. On his shoulders. It shows the gentleness. And the love. And the kindness. Of the shepherd.

And as Jesus. Is telling the story though. And showing. This love. And gentleness. The scribes. And the Pharisees. Are murmuring. They're talking. Bad. About him. They're talking. Bad. About Jesus. Why? Why are they talking. So bad? Because. He. Has got.

[20 : 17] These tax collectors. And sinners. With him. And he is. Associating. With them. If you associate. With an unclean. Person. According to the covenant. That makes you. Unclean as well.

And the Pharisees. Did not like. Uncleanliness. Ritual. Uncleanliness. But these. Are the very. People. Whom Jesus. Was taking in. Whom he was. Associating.

With. And so. They were. Grumbling. Saying. Look at this. He. He's. He's. Sitting down. With sinners. And with tax collectors. How often. Do we. Because we talk.

Bad. About the Pharisees. Right. But how often. Do we. Judge. Folks. For what they do. How often. Do we. When. People. Are legitimately. Trying.

To get to know. People. Who don't know. Jesus Christ. We say. Oh. They're associating. What. I've seen. I've seen. Pastors. Try to. Try to. Get people. In bars.

[21 : 11] Now. And preach. The gospel. To them. And people. Say. Oh. He's going to a bar. He must be a drunkard. He must be doing. Something bad. Why would he go there? He goes there. Because that's where the. Sinners are. God. We look at people.

And we say. How bad their sin is to us. Without looking at. Our own. Sin. Sometimes. Christ.

Is preaching here. Repentance. He's also preaching. Reconciliation. Because that's what God. Is trying to do. He's trying to reconcile. Sinners to himself. And sinners to one another. In his church. But we have a problem. With that sometimes. As the church. We don't want to go out. And look for. The lost sheep. Because perhaps. The lost sheep. Is a child molester. Or a murderer. Or any number.

[22:14] Of sins. That you want to put. On a person. To show how bad. And evil. They may be. But those. Are still. The very people. God. Wants.

To save. And their sin. And my sin. Are no different. I think about. My own sin. Sometimes. And. And. If you look at my hands.

I've got. Tattoos. On my fingers. And I've thought. Often times. About. Getting rid of them. Because. They're. They're ugly. And people.

Will. Judge me. And I get that. And that's cool. I don't mind. That's why I keep them. Because. It gives me something. To talk about.

With people. When I retired. From the navy. I worked in prison. You can't imagine. How many times. These came up. In conversations. With inmates. With killers. With thieves.

[23:07] With liars. With drunkards. With drug addicts. And I was able. To share the gospel. Because we had something. In common. God wants to reconcile.

Those people. And there is going. To be grumbling. When it happens. Because many of us. Myself. Included. Can be very self-righteous. At times. As the Pharisees.

And the scribes. Are in this story. And as Jesus. Is gathering. The tax collectors. And sinners. Close to him. As he talks about. This lost sheep. He's also talking.

To the Pharisees. And to the scribes. He knows. That he has them. As an audience. And he's talking. About their sin. Just as much. As he's talking. About the sin.

Of the tax collectors. And all the other pagans. And other. Unclean folks. Around. The tax. Or I'm sorry. The scribes. And the Pharisees. Just don't know.

[24:04] That they're sinners. Because they're too self-righteous. To see. And often. In the church. Today. We get too self-righteous. To see. And this. Parable. Is just as relevant.

For us. As it was. For the Jews. When Jesus. Was telling it. In the countryside. And often. Times. In our church. One person. Will go astray. And we are called.

To reconcile. That person. We're also called. To go out. From the church. And talk to those. Who are not. Members of a church. Or. Or.

Or go. On a regular basis. We are called. To talk to. The people. On the streets. And in the bars. And all the other places. That we know people. In our own families.

My. My family. I mean. We've got some doozies. And every family does. And that's okay. We're still called.

[25:00] To share the gospel. And to go after. That one. Lost sheep. You see how often.

In Luke. And in the gospels. In particular. People are always. Sitting around a table. Fellowshiping. And eating. That's what.

That's one tradition. That the church. Carries on very well. We like to sit around. The table. And eat. After service. We'll go downstairs. We'll have snacks. We'll sit around the table. Drink our coffee. Talk.

That's what we do. But you know what? That's what we're called to do. In the first century. That was something. That people did. It was a way. To show hospitality.

And as Father. Ife has already. Preached to us. When people would come in. There were certain places. That they were supposed to sit. Places of honor. And Jesus said. You know what?

[25:53] Bring in the crippled. The lame. The blind. The dirty. The beggar. The drug addict. The heroin user. Bring them in. Put them at the table. Let us reconcile with God.

Not to be judgmental. Not to be self-righteous. But to practice the ministry of reconciliation. With the parable of the lost sheep.

He also goes into the lady who lost her coin. It says in verse 8. Or what woman if she had ten drachma. If she lost one drachma.

Wouldn't light a lamp. Sweep the house. Seek diligently until she found it. When she has found it. She calls together her friends and neighbors. Saying rejoice with me. For I have found the drachma which I had lost.

Even so I tell you. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God. Over one sinner. For repenting. Over and over Jesus says repent.

[26:54] But do you know what a drachma was? In the ancient world. How much it was? This lady had ten of them. And each one was about a day's wage at the time.

Which was about for us. A hundred dollars. I would search high and low for a hundred dollars too. I am going to put the spotlight. And get out the broom.

And the dust mop. And whatever I can. To find that hundred dollars I lost. Because that is a lot of money. She seeks it. She finds it.

And she calls her neighbors together to rejoice. Just as the shepherd. When he finds his lost sheep. Calls together his neighbors. And rejoice.

Who were his neighbors by the way? Other shepherds probably. Because he doesn't have a house. He is out wandering the wilderness. But he calls them together. They rejoice together.

[27:52] And here we read that if there is a lost person who repents. One sinner who repents. There is joy in heaven. God and the angels rejoice for one sinner who repents.

Just one. Just one. If at 9-11 there was only one person found. Out of the thousands that were killed.

We would still rejoice. That one person was found. Do we rejoice today?

Are we practicing joy in the church? Do we care enough about the lost?

In our churches? And this is a question that we need to really ponder in our hearts. Do we care about the lost? The lost out there?

[28:54] Wherever out there is. Because we think of the church as these four walls. When it's not. It's each and every person who's a believer in Jesus Christ sitting down here today. But do we care about those people?

Enough to chase them down. And reconcile with them. And reconcile with God. In Christ.

You see that's the message of these two parables. It's a message of repentance. To turn from sin. To turn back toward your king.

Because the kingdom of God is here. Jesus brought in this kingdom when he stepped down from heaven and came to earth. God walked among us in the flesh.

And because he did. Legitimate believers in Jesus Christ now carry his spirit. And we are part of this great kingdom.

[30:00] There are citizens of the kingdom who don't come to church anymore. Who don't fellowship with us anymore. How often, especially since the pandemic, have we seen people who say, you know what?

I don't need to go back there. I don't want to catch the germs and the crud. And I don't want to be around all of that. So I'm just going to worship Jesus by myself here at home. I'm going to throw on the TV or a podcast or whatever.

And I'm just going to worship. Is that the way the church is supposed to be? How does that practice reconciliation? How does that practice the fellowship that we talked about in chapter 14 and chapter 15?

That's not what we're supposed to do. It's not what we are called to do. Brothers and sisters, the church is called to fellowship with one another. And yes, we are people.

We are sinners. We are saved sinners. But we are still sinners. We fight. We squabble. We do all kinds of stuff with each other. And that's what families do. That's what families have always done.

[31:06] But notice we're still a family. We are a family with God as our Father. Christ as our brother.

We are to reconcile with one another. So repentance, reconciliation, rejoice. Rejoice. Rejoice.

When we reconcile with a brother or a sister who's in sin, we rejoice.

When we go out and we find a lost sheep or we find that drachma that has fallen into the corner underneath the dresser covering and little dust bunnies, we rejoice.

We walk around sometimes with the saddest faces. Christians, we get this thing, you know, people look at us and they say, well, gosh, they're always so serious.

Well, where was Jesus's first miracle that we have recorded? At a party. And what did he do for that first miracle? He made some wine.

[32:13] Again, I'm from Kentucky. I can relate to that. We made a little wine back in the day. But pretty soon we're going to come to a table and we're going to partake of a meal.

A fellowship meal. Not only with each other, but with Christ as we remember him and his ministry of reconciliation, his ministry of repentance, his ministry of rejoicing.

We're going to drink wine together. But this wine is his blood that he shed for us. The bread is his body that was broken for us.

He did this for us because the shepherd cares for his flock. We are fortunate in the church to have under shepherds.

Remember, I said the shepherd left and he went to find the one. But the other 99, what happened to him? Where's the where's that's the under shepherd. Those are the pastors, the priests, the people who are over us, who we submit to in love because we are called to do that.

[33:35] Brothers and sisters, we should rejoice for those who repent, for those who come back. Today, I urge you.

I implore you. It reminds me of the old song. Jesus is calling. He's calling you. You as an individual. Us corporately as a church. The nations of the world. He is calling to repentance. To reconciliation. So that we might rejoice. As God and the heavenly host are rejoicing when it happens. I'm not going to belabor the point.

These parables are about rejoicing. We rejoice with Christ. We rejoice with one another. We love one another.

[34:39] We love God and we love our neighbor. Whomever our neighbor is. And now may the Lord bless you. And keep you.

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you. May the Lord be gracious unto you. And may the Lord give you peace. Amen.