

A Heart for the Lost

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 25th of April 1999.

The preacher is Warwick Grant and his talk is entitled A Heart for the Lost. A few years ago I was a participant on a camp that was being led by a wife and a husband.

They were sort of the main leaders. Anyway, at one point in the camp the wife noticed that a couple of diamonds from her engagement ring had gone missing. So she had the ring okay but she noticed there's a couple of gaps there that aren't normally there.

And she didn't really panic but I think inside she was doing double somersaults. And she was really freaking out about these missing diamonds. I mean they weren't huge but they were obviously very valuable.

And she worked out, so she thought now when did I last see these diamonds on my ring? And anyway she worked out of all places the last time she saw them was in the campsite toilets.

[1 : 0 6] Well after making sure that the toilet block was empty a couple of the guys, not me, went in to look for them. And you can imagine two guys crawling around on the floor of a woman's toilet.

It was a pretty sort of, well not the most pleasant job that I could ever think of. Then one of the guys came out and had these tiny little things in his palm and said, Do they look like this?

And it was them. And it was just like a needle in a haystack situation but they'd been found. And she was really happy as you'd expect. But other things go missing too, don't they?

Not just sort of objects but sometimes people go missing. And we've all heard news reports even fairly recently of children that have gone missing. And sometimes the end of those stories is very tragic.

Sometimes they're happy. And for those parents whose child is found safe and well, there's just, oh an incredible relief. Our child is okay. And such joy and relief when their child is returned safely.

[2 : 1 0] Well, I reckon the ultimate in being lost is being separated from God. I don't think that there's a worst way of being lost.

And what we know about things that Jesus said which are recorded for us in the Bible. And we know that Jesus is a real figure of history. He's a person who really lived. There's evidence for Jesus in other ancient writings beside the Bible.

So we know that what is recorded there is reliable and authoritative. And from what God tells us in the Bible, it's our sin that separates us or, if you like, makes us lost from God.

There's a guy called Isaiah and he's got a book in the Bible and he wrote about 750 years before Jesus. And in chapter 59 of that book, God through him describes our sin as being like a barrier between us and himself.

Our sin is like almost a physical barrier between us and God. So the plight of lost people is not a good one. Let me quote you another line from the Bible.

[3 : 18] The Apostle Paul, writing in the second letter to the people at Thessalonica, describes people who are separated from God as suffering the punishment of eternal destruction and being separated from his presence.

Surely that's an absolute, complete and total irreversible lostness. Yet God gets no joy or pleasure from our lostness.

It's not a source of delight for God that people choose to walk away from him and follow a path that makes them lost from him. Like those stories I mentioned at the start, God is rapt, he's delighted when someone turns away from a life of sinfulness and selfishness and turns back to him.

Then they're no longer lost, are they? They're found in his love and in his presence. Well, before we go on, let's look at this word lost. You may know that the New Testament was originally written in a language of ancient Greek and the word lost is perhaps not translated in the ancient Greek language as damned or doomed, but it more accurately means that something is in the wrong place.

So if something is lost, it's in the wrong place. Now we often lose things because they get into the wrong place. You know, you're looking for that certain knife to carve the roast or something and someone's put it in the wrong drawer and you turn the kitchen upside down before you find it.

[4 : 55] And when we find that thing that's in the wrong place, we return it to the place that it ought to occupy. Well, Jesus told three great parables about things that were lost.

We're going to listen to them now. And the first one is the parable of the lost sheep. And it can be found on page 850 of the black Bibles in the seats in front of you.

So if you want to follow, it's page 850. And this is Luke's Gospel at the start of chapter 15. I'll just give you a second to find that and then Olive's going to read that for us.

Page 850. Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus.

And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, This fellow welcomes sinners and is with them. So he told them this parable. Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

[6 : 07] When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Well, we're told that the Pharisees and the scribes, they're sort of like the religious bigwigs of the day. They grumbled against Jesus because he welcomed sinners and ate with them. Jesus hung around with people who other people didn't care about, people like prostitutes, tax collectors.

Tax collectors were a particularly despised group of people. And Jesus hung around with these sort of people. He cared for them. And these so-called religious leaders of the day condemned these so-called sinners who didn't keep all the petty little details of the very strict Jewish law.

One commentator has actually said that the Pharisees and scribes didn't say, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, but they probably said, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God.

[7 : 26] They seem to statistically look forward to not the saving, but the destruction of the sinful person. And in these parables, Jesus is trying to get these religious bigwigs of the day to see that people who are lost actually matter to God.

And in the parable that Jesus described, the shepherd leaves the 99 sheep in relative safety and he knows they're okay, relatively speaking. They're not lost. And he goes searching for that one sheep that is lost.

And when he finds it, there is great rejoicing and happiness. This, friends, is a picture of the God that we follow, who has a heart for the lost, for the person in the most hopeless situation.

He cares and he can be there for them if they want him to. He cares about those who don't know him as well as those who do. Let's go on to the next parable, the parable of the lost coin, at the top of the column there on page 850.

Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?

[8 : 45] When she has 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 in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

So here we have the parable of the lost coin. We might say that we're losing a coin, that's no big deal, I mean, you know, we've all lost coins. But in relative terms, in Jesus' day, this coin could be of substantial value to this woman.

So she makes every effort to find it. Now, this is another picture of God's amazing grace. God, like that woman, goes searching after those who are lost.

He doesn't just stay there saying, well, if they come to me, I'll accept them. He actually goes after us. And some of us, in our testimonies of God's faithfulness to us, will tell of God sort of knocking on the door of our lives, saying, I'm here, I love you, turn back to me, repetitively, until we've done that.

It's not as if we have to crawl up to God and plead for his salvation and maybe if he's in a good mood, he'll give it to us. It's quite the opposite. We have a God who actually seeks after sinners in the same way that this woman sought after her coin.

[10 : 05] He goes after us, shown most spectacularly in the fact that he left the splendour of heaven and became a human being, became Jesus. And that's particularly the way that he went after us and sought to bring us back to himself.

Some of you might know the story of Zacchaeus, which is a story that is taught in Sunday school. If you don't know the story, it's about a guy who was a tax collector, despised by many people, and he met Jesus and he repented of his sin and his greed and turned to follow Jesus.

And at the end of that story, we hear Jesus declare about himself that the Son of Man, and that's a title for Jesus, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

So Jesus said that I came to seek and save the lost, lost people. And that's from Luke chapter 19. See, God actively seeks out those who are lost and brings them to a point where they can see the truth about Jesus and put their faith and trust in him.

Let's go back to this parable. In verse 9, what does the woman do when she's found the coin? Well, she gets her friends and neighbours together and says, rejoice with me because I found the coin that I've lost.

[11 : 24] And remember, this coin is of quite substantial value to her. It could mean the difference between losing a day's wages or not. In verse 10, we get this incredible little glimpse into the activity of heaven.

Let me read verse 10. Just so I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Isn't it amazing?

We get this little glimpse into heaven about what happens when someone turns back to God. There is a party in heaven. God and the angels are rapt. Someone's come back and found God's love.

And there are people in our church who have come to Christian faith as we've sought to share his love with them. And whenever they've turned to him, there was a party in heaven.

So we follow a God who has an incredible heart for the lost. He loves lost people. He loves all of us. But he particularly loves those who just don't know him.

[12 : 28] No more than anyone else. But he wants them to know his love. Well, the third and final parable that we'll look at tonight is reasonably well known. And that's known as the prodigal son.

And this starts at verse 11. And Oliver will read this for us now. Then Jesus said, There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.

So he divided his property between them. A few days later, the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country.

And there he squandered his property in disilliant living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country. And he began to be in need.

So he went out and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the parts that the pigs were eating.

[13 : 36] And no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hard hands have bread enough and to spare?

But here I am, dying of hunger. I will get up 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 like one of your hard hands. So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion, he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Then 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 his slaves, Quickly, bring out a rope, the best one, and put it on him.

Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet and get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again.

[14 : 53] He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now his eldest son was in the field and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.

Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, Listen, for all these years I have been working like a slave for you and I have never disobeyed your command.

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

Then the father said to him, Son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life.

[16 : 10] He was lost and has been found. That parable is known probably by many of you. I particularly want to focus on the father's reaction in verse 20 and following.

Remember the father in the parable represents God. Let's just look at verse 20. Halfway through the verse there.

But while he was still far off, that's the younger brother, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

You can almost picture this dad, can't you, sort of upstairs, sort of squinting through the window at this little figure on the horizon coming towards the house wondering, geez, is that him?

And the father, we're told, was just filled with compassion and he ran and put his arms around his son and kissed him. It's describing what God's like when people turn back to him.

[17 : 15] That's what God's like. God embraces them and welcomes them back. The father didn't condemn his son. There's not one word of condemnation. Not from the father anyway.

He embraced his son. He was so happy to have him back. Paul the apostle reminds us in one of his letters in the Bible that there is no condemnation for those who are members of God's family.

No condemnation. Not for this son. Quite the opposite. There's a party. There's a feast. God is rapt when anyone turns back to him and walks in the truth.

Let's look at verses 22 to 24. The father said to his slaves, quickly, bring out a robe, the best one, and put it on him and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet and get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate.

For this son of mine was dead and he's alive again. He was lost and he's found. And they began to celebrate. This is the God who has a heart for the lost.

[18 : 27] Don't get me wrong. God is also a God of justice. And there are those who have decided not to turn back to him and to go their own way. They will encounter God's white hot wrath when they stand before him.

But for those who are lost and allow God to rescue them, they will encounter a God of wonderful compassion. People are lost when they are far away from God.

And using our understanding of the word lost that we talked about before, something in the wrong place. If we're not close to God, we're in the wrong place.

But when we return to him, knowing his love and forgiveness and seeking to obey him, then we are found. We're in the right place. We're in the place we belong.

God made us to have a relationship with him. If we neglect that, we're not truly human. We can only be truly human when we are in a relationship with God. As the famous hymn goes, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

[19 : 43] I once was, but now I'm, I was blind, but now I can see. And whether they acknowledge it or not, every human being belongs with God.

We were made to enjoy that friendship with him. I wonder, are you lost? Are you in that wrong place?

Away from God? You can ask God to forgive you, to accept you, like the prodigal son. He will welcome you with open arms if you do.

He won't condemn you. He'll help you get back on track, living a life that pleases him, life in all its fullness, that he wants you to enjoy. He'll be there in the hard times.

He'll be there for you in the good times. If you mean it sincerely, you can know that God of compassion embracing you and welcoming you home. It's great that our God has a heart for the lost.

[20 : 47] He cares about them. The question is, do we? Do we care about those who are lost?

Far away from God. Do we have a heart for them like our God does? Well, there's a wonderful passage in Matthew's story about Jesus.

It's on page 790 of the Bibles, if you want to turn to that and follow with me. Page 790. And it's Matthew 9, verses 35 to 38.

So page 790, Matthew 9, beginning at verse 35. I'll just read it for us. Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.

[22 : 07] Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. So picture this scene, you know, his Jesus looking over the crowd.

And in verse 36, the word compassion has a sense that, in the original language, that Jesus was actually moved to the very depth of his being. He was really touched and really moved.

He really had a heart for these lost people. You see, the religious leaders, these bigwigs I spoke of before, they were meant to be the shepherds of the people, politically and spiritually.

But they provided no political leadership or spiritual care. The people indeed were harassed and helpless, even by their so-called religious leaders. And Jesus saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd.

The people were like a ripe harvest, a harvest that's just ready to be taken. So many of these people and yet so few to share God's love with them.

[23 : 13] Sometimes I've gone to the footy or a concert or, it sort of often happens for me if I'm like at the MCG and there's like, you know, 80 or something thousand people there and you see this sea of people, this sea of faces.

And I'm reminded of this Bible verse. People often do look like sheep without a shepherd. Many of them probably don't know Jesus and his love.

They're lost. That sounds really condescending perhaps, but I speak as one who knows God's love and knows his care in my life and I wish it for every human being.

What Jesus' command in verse 38 of this passage is just as relevant today as it was when Jesus spoke it roughly 2,000 years ago. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.

We still need many more people to go into the world and into our own local community to seek those who are lost. Jesus commands us to pray to God that he would raise up such people.

[24 : 20] What about ourselves? We might be the answer to that sort of prayer. Are we prepared and willing to be the answer to that kind of prayer? Are we prepared to get our own hands dirty as we seek to reach out to those who are lost?

Even before that, do we have a heart for them? Are we like the shepherd who is prepared to put themselves out, put themselves at risk to find that one sheep that is lost?

Are we like the woman who searched diligently for that lost coin and treasured it greatly and was so happy when she found it? Are we like that loving father in that story of the prodigal son who forgot himself and just bolted out of the door and ran to meet his son and embraced him?

That's God. That's God being described there. Do we have a heart for the lost like that? Do we see our next door neighbours and our friends and our relatives and our business associates and our schoolmates who don't know Jesus as people who are lost, far from God?

People who, if they keep going down that track, will never know his love. Most of us were probably deeply touched by the story of the shootings in Denver during the week.

[25 : 43] It seems that these guys that did this shooting were outcasts, lost. Indeed, some reports have said they were Satanists, very much lost people, very much in the wrong place, far from God.

I don't know where they are now, but God will judge them justly. But in their lives, God loved them. He didn't love what they did, but he certainly loves them and he loves all people, even the so-called dregs of our society, whoever they are.

God loves every human being, no matter how hopeless and earthly situation they're in. I wonder, do we sometimes pretend that the job of reaching the lost has been completed?

It's sort of all done. And maybe sometimes we have a hard heart or one that doesn't care. I'm just going to finish with a song which we're going to play over the speakers and it's called Asleep in the Light.

It's by a guy called Keith Green. He's an American singer who tragically died in 1982 in a plane crash. Now, I don't play this song to make us feel guilty, but to just inspire us to have soft hearts, to have hearts for those who are lost and far from God.

[27 : 02] Let's listen to it now. And there'll be some words on the screen just to help you focus on what you're hearing. Do you see?

Do you see? All the people sinking down, don't you care? Don't you care? Are you going to let them drown?

How can you be so numb not to care if they come? You close your eyes and pretend they're just done?

Oh, bless me, Lord. Bless me, Lord. You know, it's all I ever hear. No one aches, no one hurts, no one even sheds one tear.

But he cries, he weeps, he bleeds, and he cares for your needs. And you just lay back and keep soaking it in.

[28 : 19] Oh, can't you see it's such a thing? Cause he brings people to your door and you turn them away as you smile and say, God bless you, be at peace and all heaven just weeps.

Cause Jesus came to your door You've left him out on the street Open up, open up and give yourself away You see the need, you hear the cries So how can you delay?

God's calling and you're the one that likes you're in your life He's told you to speak but you keep holding it in Oh, can't you see such sin?

The world is sleeping in the dark That the church just can't fight Cause it's asleep in the light How can you be so dead When you've been so wealthy?

Jesus rose from the grave And you, you can't even get out of bed Oh, Jesus rose from the dead Come on, get out of bed Come on, get out of bed Come on, get out of bed How can you be so numb How can you be so numb Not to care if they come You close your eyes And pretend The job's done You close your eyes Don't pretend The job's done Don't close your eyes Don't pretend The job's done As I said, we didn't play that to make anyone feel guilty but just to inspire us to have soft hearts

[30 : 58] Hearts for those who are lost those who are far from God Well, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost He said that Himself and He calls us to share that love with other people There are plenty of opportunities in our church where you can do that and if you sort of think how do I do that?

How do I share God's love with other people? There are courses that you can do where you can learn how to share your faith sensitively and appropriately with other people. If you want to find out about those please speak to me or Paul or Phil or Sue or any of our other church leaders we'd be only happy to tell you about them. Well, just to finish let's just say a prayer and confessing to God times when perhaps we've had a hard heart we haven't shared His love with others and I'll include a time for a general time of confessing our sins to God and then we'll be doing some other things so let's pray if you'd like to Lord God we just want to say thank you so much that you have stacks of compassion for people who don't know you Lord we really pray that we can have a heart that's like yours and that we can really seek after those who are lost we just want to confess to you right now times perhaps when we've turned a blind eye to someone who is lost someone who doesn't know your love in some way we've sort of shunned them pretended they're not there let's confess those times we've done that to God now so God please help us to have the courage to share your love with others or if we don't know your love ourselves to have the courage to be open to find out some more about you

Lord we also want to bring before you times when we've done things that haven't pleased you in our lives perhaps things we've thought or things we've said or things we've done or things perhaps we should have done that we didn't do just in a moment of quiet let's bring those before God now as well thanks God that you hear our praise and that you are the incredible God of compassion we've just been talking about tonight thank you that in your Bible in many many places you tell us that we confess our sins to you you are faithful and you're just and you'll forgive us our sins God we thank you and we claim your promise and we claim your forgiveness now for the wrong things we've mentioned we ask that you help us to lead lives that please and honour you in Jesus name Amen answering continues you

Thank you.

Thank you.

[35 : 53] Thank you.

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[38 : 23] Thank you.

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[40 : 53] Thank you.

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[43 : 23] Thank you.