

Lost and Found

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[0 : 0 0] Well, Jesus is a good teacher. No, actually, he's a great teacher, and I'm sure you all know this, but he's a great teacher not simply in what he teaches, that is the content, but also in how he teaches, the method, the manner in which he goes about teaching.

And I think here with the three lost parables, we have a case in point. Now, if you recall, the Pharisees have been giving Jesus a hard time.

When he was last at one of their houses, they weren't too happy with him. He had showed up their pride and pretense. Now, however, they have become jealous as well because he was spending time with sinners and tax collectors.

They were thinking, how dare he? This teacher of God, he claims to be a righteous man. How can he be spending time with unrighteous sinners? Well, in these three lost parables, Jesus gives them the answer.

But he does it in a way that any good teacher would, by using repetition and patterns. Today, we will look at the first two a bit closely, but next week, we will look at the third parable.

[1 : 1 5] And the clue with the first two parables is to look at what's common with all three, but also particularly with the first two, because Jesus uses repetition to communicate his main point.

And next week, when we look at the third parable, it's the twist or the variation on the theme that gives us the main point. So if you look with me at verse four, Jesus says to them, suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them.

Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, rejoice with me.

I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, rejoice with me.

[2 : 2 8] I have found my lost coin. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Well, what do you think are the common things that you find between the two parables?

Well, as any good teacher would, they would get the class students to talk among themselves, right? So I'm going to give you one minute. Why don't you turn to the person next to you and see if you can come up with your own observations as to what you think the common things are, all right?

So 60 seconds. Go for it. Okay. How did we go?

As in any good class as well, the teacher always asks the students to shout out the answers, right? So can I have some answers? Observations? It doesn't have to be answers. Observations?

Anyone? First one gets a lolly. No, I don't have any lollies. I do have lollies in the car. Well, first one. Anyone? Ruby? Okay.

[3 : 40] Yep. Rejoicing in what was lost. Yep. Any more? Yep. Yep. What about the numbers?

Okay. One to 99. One to nine. Yep. The proportion. Yep. Okay. Call the neighbors to... Yep. Yep. Yep.

They leave the 99 or the nine and go and find the one. Yep. Good. Say again. Sinner and repentance. The last line. Yes. Rejoicing in heaven, someone said.

Who was that? Allison? Yep. Okay. Good. They don't stop till they find it. Yep. Whoever I can see who said it. Okay. That's it. Well done.

Class finished. Now, those are all good answers. I think you picked up most of them. I don't have anything more new to say. But I want to draw a few things together. And just focus on a couple.

[4 : 44] And then just use that as by way of drawing the lesson together and the application. So first, we have a situation where in both cases, things are lost.

And with both, there's a relentless surge until what's found. Sorry. What's lost is found. No expense is spared. No effort passed up. So with the shepherd, it's the expense of the care of the 99 sheep.

And in fact, in the open country, that actually puts them at risk while he's gone off to find the one. And with the coin, it's the meticulous sweeping of the house. I think her lighting of the lamp is so that she can get into every dark corner by shining the light in.

But second, what we see here as well is celebration. And perhaps even exuberant celebration. And in a way, if you think about it, that is a bit over the top, isn't it?

It's not absolutely necessary to be rejoicing like that, particularly with the coin. I've lost coins before in my own house. Some of them have remained lost. But the ones that I've found, I have not really rushed out of the house, the front door, and run up the street and, you know, jumped up and down, have I?

[6 : 00] No. But here, not only does the shepherd or the woman rejoice, they implore others to join in. Rejoice with me, is what they say.

Of course, what it shows is just how precious the thing is. It's the same when sometimes parents lose their children in a crowded shopping center. It's happened to me once, I think.

And when that happens, I can't even remember. I think once, yeah. They're still here with me, so that's good. No harm done. But when it happens, you are beside yourself.

Those of you who are parents would know that. Or even grandparents. All sorts of unthinkable scenarios run through your head as to what could happen. But then when you find your children safe and sound, your child, there is just this overwhelming sense of joy and relief, isn't there?

You give them the biggest hugs and kisses. You're close to tears. It's almost involuntary. And that's just because it arises out of your love for that child.

[7 : 09] He or she is precious to you. And you can't conceive of life without them. That's how the shepherd feels for the lost. That's how the woman feels for the lost coin.

And that's how God feels for the lost. But notice, too, that there is nothing special about this one sheep or coin. This lost sheep doesn't have a golden fleece.

The lost coin is not this special commemorative one that is of a greater value, a rarer coin. No, it's just an ordinary sheep or coin, just like the others that have not been lost.

But still, it's precious to the lost. And it receives the full, relentless attention of the owner. And that is the point that Jesus is making here.

God has a heart for the lost. Like a doctor whose time is given to healing the sick and not the well, Jesus' attention is focused on sinners and not the righteous.

[8 : 15] And that's why in the final line of the parable, in both parables, actually, it says that there is more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than for those who do not need to repent.

Now, of course, the reality is that the Pharisees weren't righteous at all. Jesus is not saying that they are righteous and therefore they don't need him. Rather, Jesus was deliberately favoring the sinners to provoke the Pharisees to see that they needed Jesus, that they would see their own pride and then repent and turn back to God.

See, the Pharisees were not righteous so much as self-righteous, who think that they don't need God or repentance.

And friends, we live in a world, don't we, that is just as lost. People may appear happy. They may have all they need in life, so they think.

But underneath, they are lost. I'm sure many of you have seen the photos of that NRL player that killed the family with the petrol. It was horrific, wasn't it?

[9 : 29] But the thing that struck me was, if you look at the photos of them before the incident, they looked like a happy, perfect family, didn't they? He looked handsome, I think. She looked good-looking, attractive.

And the children were like, you know, angels. They seemed like the perfect family on the beach and all that. And yet, so much was happening underneath, wasn't it?

He was lost. She was desperate, probably. And that probably together, they were all confused as to what life's all about and who they were.

And I think we know, ourselves or maybe others, that many people do search for answers in life, don't they? Some of them try and find it in their work, in pleasure, trying to tick things off their bucket list.

They may even have tried to find their identity in their achievements, or their children, or their relationships, or their sexuality. And I suppose in the West, we haven't helped either, have we?

[10 : 32] Because of late, we've been trying to undermine the very foundations of our society, what God has given to us in terms of Christian foundations. We think that by doing that, we are freeing ourselves from these constraints.

But instead, I think we've just left people more confused. Instead of helping them really grapple with life's struggles by giving them a firm understanding of what's right or wrong, we've said to them, as long as you feel right, then it's right.

And yet, we know, don't we? Feelings are the most unreliable thing to use to determine what's right or wrong. Because they are as changeable as the weather. In fact, it often changes with the weather, right?

Today's been a sunny day. I bet you most of you felt good. Next week, when the rain comes down, you're probably going to think life is terrible. And friends, if there's any of us here who are struggling with life right now, if you feel lost and unsure about what life is all about, then the good news of these parables is that God has sent his son Jesus to rescue us from this life of lostness, this quagmire of confusion and hopelessness.

Life doesn't have to be like that, where we're tossed back and forth, where there doesn't seem to be any hope. Just like the shepherd and the woman, God has sent his son to search and find us.

[12 : 05] Just like the shepherd and the woman, God spared no effort. It was costly for Jesus because it cost him his life. You see, whether it's the society as a whole or as individuals, we're lost because we've wandered away from God, haven't we?

We've gone astray, each according to his own way, as Isaiah says. Perhaps some of us have been unwittingly deceived. Others may know that what we're doing is wrong and still insist on doing it.

But either way, we've wandered from God. We've turned our backs on him. And in our pride and self-centeredness, we've decided that, no, we can work this out for ourselves.

We're going to walk our own way. And so we're lost, aren't we? Whether we admit it or not. Because we're no longer in relationship with the one who created us.

We're not where we belong. And the Bible calls this sinning against God, that we are sinners. Not so much that we've done this or that wrong, but more importantly, that we've separated ourselves from God, our creator, who should rightly be our ruler.

[13 : 15] And Jesus had to come in order to reconcile us back to God by his death, to restore that relationship. But Jesus, having done that, still requires of us to respond in repentance.

That's our only way back to God. That's why, again, if you look at that final line of those two parables, in 7 and 8, verses 7 and 8, it's the sinner who repents that God rejoices over.

It's the sinner who repents that God seeks. Not everyone, but the sinner who repents. Now, what does the sinner who repents look like?

Well, simply the one that realizes that they're lost. They need to turn back from the road that they're traveling and turn back to God in humility. Turn back and ask God for forgiveness.

And then live God's way among God's people. See, one thing about this parable is that it's not like God didn't know where we are all this time, is it?

[14 : 20] And that's, I think, how we're different from the lost sheep and coin in that sense. God being God, He actually knows everything about us. He knows where we've been.

So we've not been lost because God has lost us. Rather, we're lost because we've lost Him. We're the ones that don't know where we are.

So it's like, instead of being that parent, we're like that lost child in that crowded shopping center. We're the ones that have wandered away from our parents. Most of you, I think, are probably too old to remember, but I'm sure that there would have been a time when Mom and Dad took you to the shopping center.

and, you know, they should have known better, but they took you past the toy department. And there, your eyes caught the latest Lego set or the latest Barbie doll or whatever else that takes your fancy.

And immediately, without caring where your mom and dad were, you rushed towards it, mesmerized, wouldn't it? Take it out, looked at it, turned the box over. And then when you finally turned to your parents, wanting them to buy it, you know, they're no longer there.

[15 : 35] You've lost them. And then you start to panic, still gripping to the toy, of course, but you start to cry and wonder where your parents are. But unbeknownst to you, your parents know exactly where you are.

They've been watching you from a distance, watching you from the corner of their eye, just waiting to see when you realize that you've just wandered off without telling them. Well, that's the same with God, isn't it?

He's never lost sight of us, even when we've run off from Him. And that's why I chose that Psalm today, 139, because it starts off like this. You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. And then further down in verse 7, where can I go from your spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. Can you see what the psalmist is saying?

[16 : 41] We're not lost in the sense that God doesn't know where we are, is it? In fact, He even knows what's going on in our hearts and minds right now, more than we do.

No, God hasn't lost us. We've lost Him. We've separated from Him relationally. And as a result of that, because we don't know Him, we don't know ourselves as well.

And the only way back is to come back to God, to be in relationship with Him. And so if you look right down to the end of the psalm, which is on the slides, verse 23, Friends, being willing to pray like this is what repentance is all about.

It's all about saying we're willing to be subject to God's scrutiny. Now, of course, God already knows, as I said, our hearts and our thoughts. He knows every offensive way in us.

But by praying like that, we are asking God also to let us know, to reveal to us, to search us, and let us know where we have gone astray. And yes, it's not pleasant, it's humbling.

[18 : 06] There's nowhere to hide when God reveals things to us. No more excuses. But can you see the promise? It leads us to the way everlasting. It leads us back to God through Jesus.

Now, I know often that there is a fear to admit we're wrong, whether it's at work or at home. We don't like to be told we're wrong because we feel like when we admit we're wrong, we're going to get scolded even more.

I know as a parent I've been guilty of doing that. So, sorry, Emma and Lauren. But that's not like that with God, is it? Not as He reveals it in this parable.

Because every time we come back to God and say, God, we've wronged you, what He does is to welcome us back. Not condemn us, but to rejoice over us and to actually welcome us with open arms, with the angels rejoicing with Him in heaven.

And that's true not just when we first come to Jesus or God, but it's true each and every time we've done something wrong and we come back to God. That's just the way God is.

[19 : 10] That's His heart. He loves the repentant sinner. So, I think, you know, whenever we feel like we've done the wrong thing, well, let's not wallow in self-pity.

Let's not beat ourselves up about it and say, you know, we should be better than we are. Because the truth is we're not. Instead, what we ought to do is come back to God and say, thank you for Jesus and thank you because of Jesus.

Every time I come back to you, God, you welcome me. and you rejoice over me. Now, I don't say any of this to belittle sin as if to say it's not serious.

No, we ought to be genuinely horrified by what we've done, the wrong we've done. But that horror should also lead us back to God through Jesus and to see that Jesus has died even for the ugliest of my sins.

No matter how bad I've been, no sin is too bad that Jesus did not die for it. So let me just emphasize this. There's no sin so ugly or shameful that it's beyond God to forgive.

[20 : 22] And it may be that you've been a Christian for a while and yet you're still hiding the shame of past sins or maybe even present ones. Let me say that no matter how shameful you think it is, it's not beyond God's forgiveness because Jesus is a great Savior.

So don't turn away from Him. Don't hide that as, don't carry that burden of that guilt or shame but repent it, bring it before the Lord and then find everlasting welcome in the Father.

And if this is your first time that you're doing this tonight then please come and talk to me afterwards. I would love to rejoice with you. I would like to also assure you of God's forgiveness whatever that you may have done.

But for the rest of us having found this forgiveness then as found sinners we should also respond by having the same heart that God has, shouldn't we? A heart for the lost.

Because surely if we've experienced God's amazing grace we would want others to receive that as well, wouldn't we? To hear about the forgiveness that is found in Jesus? And so here's my second challenge for us today which is the two questions at the bottom.

[21 : 40] The first one we've dealt with. The second one is that we are to have the same heart for the lost. Have we been praying and thinking for those that we know and love, those that do not know Jesus?

Have we been spending time trying to reach out to them? I know that sometimes we are so caught up in our life, in our work, I'm as guilty as the other in doing just that and forgetting about the lost?

Well, we shouldn't do that, should we? And as I said, we shouldn't beat ourselves up about it. We should say sorry to God and let's get back into it. Some of you who were here last year remember that I asked, I gave out a slip of paper, a green one I think, and I asked you to put three names on it and asked you to pray for those three people that God's put on your heart.

Well, have you been doing that? I know I haven't as regularly as I ought. Well, let's start that again. Let's keep praying for those three people that God has put on our hearts and let's pray that God will give us a heart for the lost just like He has and then afterwards when we have that passion to ask God to give us that opportunity and to give us the words, the right words to say so that we can encourage people to consider Jesus, to think about their life, and to see in Jesus someone who will welcome them back into God's presence.

I was at a growth group meeting on Monday and someone shared that someone in their family just gave their life to Jesus. That family member was only a little child, so it was a simple childlike faith, but still, it was a child that is precious to God.

[23 : 26] Now, I have to admit that we all didn't get up and start dancing with joy, but we were dancing inside, I'm pretty sure, and we did say God must be having a party right now.

Now, I'm pretty sure God's having parties all the time because there are Christians, you know, people becoming Christians all around the world every single moment, isn't there? And so we probably ought to be rephrasing and rejoicing as well, but I don't know about you, too.

I feel like it's always a bit more special when you are celebrating someone whom you know personally, isn't it? Someone you know that has come to Christ, even though we should be praising God for all the people around the world that become Christians, the one we love and the one we know in our midst who becomes a Christian, that's just a bit special, isn't it?

And so I want a piece of that action. I want to see more of that in my life, and I want to see more of that in our church. So why don't we pray that God will give us that chance of seeing people that we know, that we've prayed for in our midst come to Jesus and then we can party all the time.

Let's pray. Father, we pray for those who may be lost in our midst today. They are sick and tired of searching and coming up short, of trying harder and still coming up empty.

[24 : 49] Please give them the courage to humble themselves and to turn back to you in repentance. Help them to see that Christ has died for them and that there is no shame, no condemnation in whatever they've done in the past.

Lord, for those of us that we care about, that are still lost, please give us your heart for them and give us the opportunity to share with them this great Savior that we found, no actually, this great Savior that has found us whose name is Jesus.

And here I just want to pause and give you a chance to pray for someone by name in silence and then I'll close this prayer. Father, hear our prayers in the name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.