

Lost and Found

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[0 : 00] Well, please do, if you've got a Bible in front of you, please turn back to Luke chapter 15. That's page 1047. Well, for those in the overflow, there's the handouts that you should have as well.

I wonder if you've ever seen those lost and found signs before. Have you seen those? Kind of like this one, lost, have you seen my cat? The only problem with this one is here is the cat.

Or sometimes it's a found sign, like this cheeky person who says, if you've lost a stack of 20-dollar notes wrapped in a rubber band, I found your rubber band.

But I wonder if you've ever lost something yourself, whether it's your keys, I'm always losing my keys, your wallet, purse or phone. I'm guessing we can all relate to this experience.

When you lose it, you search for it, don't you? And when you find it, you rejoice over it. Because those things matter to you. Well, this is what Jesus begins teaching the Pharisees about lost sinners, that they matter to God.

[1 : 12] And we need to see this. We need to start with the context. So at point one in your outlines, which is in the pew sheets, and verse one in your Bible handouts.

So there it says, Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. I've got the verses on the screen too, I should have said, because we're streaming this service. We're all sinners, we're gathering around to hear Jesus.

But the Pharisees and the teacher of the law muttered, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Here we're told that the outcasts of Jewish society, you know, tax collectors and sinners, Are drawing near to hear Jesus.

And instead of rejecting them, Jesus welcomes them, doesn't he? Not just with, you know, good morning at the church door, But by eating with them, a sign of genuine fellowship with them.

In other words, he literally receives them into his band of disciples who listen and obey his word. The word hear, Jesus at the end of verse one, has the idea of listen and obey.

[2 : 22] It can also mean obey. And that's what disciples do, don't we? We hear Jesus' word. That is, we listen and obey. Or at least we should, shouldn't we? But the religious leaders can't believe it.

They mutter or literally grumble at it. It's as though they say, how can this teacher and miracle worker associate with such sinners? How can he welcome or literally receive them into his band of disciples?

Surely, that's only reserved for people like us. And it's this response that causes Jesus to tell these parables.

Point to verse three and four. Jesus told them this parable. 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?

I should point out here that the way Jesus asks this question, he actually expects them to agree with him. That is, this seems to be standard shepherd practice.

[3 : 27] Open countries, away from cliffs or being lost in scrubs. So presumably it was safe enough. But standard shepherd practice probably did not involve the rejoicing that we see in verses five to seven.

And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, 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. Now in Luke's gospel there are other people who are called righteous, but none of them would ever think they never have need to repent.

Like us, they would know that we all still sin from time to time. And so we do need to repent from time to time. But who in Jesus' day thought they had no need to repent? It was the Pharisees, wasn't it? You see, Jesus is primarily speaking to them. And his point is, while they may not value sinners and tax collectors, God does.

[4 : 37] The lost matter to him. For there is searching for them, finding of them, and rejoicing over them. I mean, you only search for things that have value to you, don't you?

And you only rejoice greatly over things that have great value to you, don't you? And so instead of grumbling, these Pharisees should have been rejoicing.

That these lost sinners are found by Jesus, received by him. Because God values the lost. They matter to him. The second parable follows the same pattern.

There's lost coin this time. There's sustained searching. There's finding and rejoicing. And then again, the punchline in verse 10 is that there is rejoicing in heaven over a lost sinner who is found. That's the point. Lost sinners matter to God. He values them. Why? Well, because he loves them. I've mentioned at Doncaster morning services before how one of my daughters is desperate to get a dog.

[5 : 49] And she's still desperate. And now, much to my dismay, meet Toby. Toby. He's already on the couch. But he escaped just for a moment.

And just for a moment, she lost him. And so she searched for him. And when she found him, there was great rejoicing. By her, not me. Toby. Because Toby matters to her.

She values him because she loves him. Lost sinners are not sheep or coins or even puppies. They are people made in God's image, aren't they?

And so God values them because he loves them deeply. And this is what is highlighted in the third parable. It's still directed primarily to the Pharisees and it still follows a similar pattern.

But this parable gets personal. And instead of showing the breadth of searching for the lost, it shows the depth of heart for or towards the lost.

[6 : 55] So point three and verse 11 to 13 in your Bibles are on the screen. Notice here, you know the story. I won't read it all out again. The youngest son commands his father to give him his share of inheritance now.

And as you know, inheritance normally comes when someone has died. And so the son is effectively saying, Dad, I wish you were dead now. Then he walks away from his father.

And so the father was dead to him. To live the world's way instead. Even though his father gave him life and everything good to enjoy in life.

The father clearly represents God and the son obviously represents the sinners and tax collectors. And the problem with sin is that it makes us actually spiritually dead towards God.

Doesn't it? And it often leads to a mess in life. Like verses 14 to 16. Where the son goes off and squanders everything.

[7 : 51] And then ends up hiring himself out to feed pigs. And he's so hungry, verse 16, that he longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating.

But no one gave him anything. Sin may not lead us to a literal pigsty, but it can lead us to a mess in life, can't it? How many families have been ruined by the sin of a member?

Whether an affair that broke a marriage or greed that led to bankruptcy or selfishness that led to a rift. I conducted a funeral for someone outside our church just before Christmas. And three of the sons could not contact the fourth to tell him that his father had passed away because of a rift in the family.

They ended up having to hire a private investigator. Such was the depth of the rift in the family. And certainly sin lands us in a spiritual pigsty when it comes to God.

Remember, Jesus is speaking to Jews at the moment. And pigs are unclean for Jews, aren't they? And so here is a picture of sin making us unclean towards God.

[9 : 00] In fact, the son longed to eat like a pig. Sin makes us almost subhuman. Sin makes us even less than what God wants for us as humans.

But there is a solution. And that is to repent. And so that's what the son does in verses 17 to 19. Here's a great picture of repentance.

Firstly, he comes to his senses and changes his mind. The word repent literally means change of mind. He decides to go back to his father and live his way.

And this change of mind leads to a confession of mouth that he has sinned against heaven and against his father. And a humble plea for forgiveness to take him back, not as a son, but as a servant.

This is repentance. And it's the kind of picture that we Christians also need to keep living out in our own lives, don't we? Because again, we still sin, don't we? And so when we do, we need to come to our senses, change our mind, confess and humbly ask for forgiveness.

[10:07] And the great news, as you know, is that God will forgive because he is full of compassion. I mean, look at the father in the story. So the son got up and went to his father.

But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

It's a great picture of the father's love, isn't it? At first, it seems the father had been searching the horizon for any sign of his son because he spots him while the son is still far off.

And then he runs to him, which was not proper for Middle Eastern men of that time. Then hugs him and kisses him even before the son has had a chance to verbally confess to him.

Notice. This is how ready the father is to forgive. Why? Well, we're told because his heart is filled with compassion for his son.

[11:11] Some time ago, I heard a true story about another son who basically did a similar thing. He cut off contact with his parents, left and lived the way of the world.

I can't remember what made him decide to go back home. But I do remember he wrote a letter to his mother first asking to see whether she would forgive him and welcome him back.

And so he wrote, Mum, if you will forgive me and let me come home, please put a white handkerchief on the clothesline so I know. You see, the backyard where the clothesline was butted up against the train tracks.

And so as he was in the train and went past his backyard, he'd be able to see the white handkerchief and know whether he would be forgiven and welcomed home. But as the train passed by, he didn't see any white handkerchief on the clothesline.

What he saw was every single white sheet, curtain and towel the mother had blanketing the clothesline, beckoning him home.

[12:13] Such was his mother's heart for her lost son. That's the father's heart here. That's our heavenly father's heart. It's why Tim Keller calls this parable the prodigal God rather than the prodigal son.

A prodigal meaning recklessly extravagant. Which not only describes the son's bad behaviour, but also the father's deep love.

Recklessly extravagant. And this father's extravagant love is further highlighted by what he does next. The son only gets halfway through his confession before the father tells the servants to quick, bring the best robe, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

Verse 23, bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. Verse 24, for the son of mine was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.

So they began to celebrate. Notice here that the father calls him his son. And in so doing restores his status. And not as a servant, but as a son.

[13:21] He's in the family. He's back in the family. But also notice this is no ordinary celebration. The fattened calf, as you know, was the best. The kind you'd keep for the biggest kind of occasion.

Perhaps like a big wedding. And yet for God, the biggest occasion for him is when lost sinners are found. See, God loves the lost deeply.

His heart is filled with compassion for them. That he's ready and waiting to forgive them. And then celebrate over them when they're found. What a heart our father has.

A heart that's different to the older brothers who represents the Pharisees, actually. And so the older brother hears about what's going on, verses 25 to 27.

And then in verses 28 to 30, he becomes angry and refuses to go into the celebration. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But the son, the older brother answered, Father, look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

[14:25] Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours, not my brother, this son of yours, who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.

You see what the brother's saying? This celebration is inappropriate over such a sinner. In fact, it's wrong. He is angry and sings that song. You know, the Shannon Noel one?

What about me? It isn't fair. I've had enough now. I want my share. That's what he's saying, isn't it? But that's because the older brother hasn't understood grace.

When it comes to the world's way, we are celebrated by earning it, whether it's at work or uni or school or whatever it is. But when it comes to God's family, we are celebrated by God giving us life, by grace.

Grace is undeserved gift. We can never do enough to earn our way into his family, but because of his heart for us, he forgives us and welcomes us as an undeserved gift.

[15:31] Grace. Grace. And I wonder if the father's first response is to subtly teach his oldest son this. For he says in verse 31, My son, the father said, you are always with me and everything I have is yours.

You see, this older brother is always with the father. He always has access to the father and will inherit everything left of the father's estate, which as the eldest son would have been double the younger.

I mean, that older brother didn't earn all that, did he? No, even his inheritance is by grace. But the bigger lesson the father wants this brother to learn is finding lost sinners really matters.

It's such a big deal. It must be celebrated. For it's nothing less than the dead coming to life. Verse 32, he goes on to say, But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother, he's actually your brother, was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. I mean, I know people, if their loved one was raised to life now, they would party.

[16:50] Well, so too, when the lost are found, because it's a big deal. It's like the dead coming to new life. We don't know how the older son responded, probably deliberately so, to provoke the Pharisees to think about how they might respond.

But the point is clear enough. When it comes to lost sinners, these Pharisees are not to be like the older brother. They're to have a heart like the father. So instead of grumbling at sinners being received by Jesus, they might rejoice at sinners being found by Jesus, being brought to new spiritual life.

Indeed, they might even seek the lost to bring them to hear Jesus's word and be found by Jesus too. That's the big application for them and it's the same for us.

You see, you may be here today just visiting and not yet a Christian and if that's you, then welcome. It's great to have you with us. But do realize that ignoring God, walking away from the father like this younger son did, lands you in a spiritual pigsty, makes you spiritually dead to God and creates a mess in life.

And so do repent. Change your mind. Come to your senses and draw near to Jesus. Hear his word. That is, listen and obey his word. That says, whoever believes in me will not perish but have eternal life, will be forgiven and welcomed into God's family.

[18:28] But for most of us here, I'm guessing we have been found by God. We have been drawn to Jesus and believe in Jesus and yet we still sin, don't we? And so as I said before, the first application, I guess, is to keep repenting, to keep changing our minds from living the world's way to live God's way, confessing our sins and humbly asking for forgiveness.

But the second application for us, and the big one, I think, is what I've already said. We're to have the father's heart for the lost. A heart that loves them enough to help them hear the word of Jesus, that they might be found by Jesus.

One of our church members here has a colleague who knew she was a Christian and so this colleague asked her if she could visit his friend Tim who was dying of cancer in Knox Hospital. Now this church member didn't know Tim at all, but she went to see him and share her faith with him. And then she went back again and again and again for 18 months.

Why would she do that? She doesn't even know this Tim. Well, because she has a heart like our heavenly father's heart, you see. And in God's kindness, two weeks before Christmas, Tim became a Christian.

[20:00] He was found and there was great rejoicing in heaven. And just over two weeks ago, Tim died and now he is in heaven because God used one of our members who had a heart like him.

It might look different for us. It might mean praying for them or asking others to speak to them because you're not confident yourself or perhaps if you are reading the Bible with them or inviting them to an event.

It's doing whatever we can to help them hear the word of Jesus that they might be found by Jesus. And so the focus for us as a church this year is to do this.

We do evangelism every year, yes, but after the COVID years, last year I encouraged us to put first things first. You know, it was messy years, things were all over the place.

So last year, put first things first in our own lives and in our church. And now this year to focus on really doing what we can to see the lost found. To do what we can that they might hear the word of Jesus, repent, believe and be found by Jesus.

[21 : 08] And so as a church, this means praying for loss which we'll do each month now at our monthly prayer night. So the first one this Wednesday night, 7.30. It also means as a church being part of a nationwide campaign called Meet Jesus which is put on by our AFES Christian uni groups.

You can even get tote bags and hats if you like. You might recognize some of our 5pm members in that photo. More and more importantly, they are providing a little book which I very helpfully left in my bag at the back of the church.

I can't show you. But there's a little book which has six passages from John's Gospel. And I've already ordered them and the idea is you get one for you and one for them and you can catch up six times and help them to meet Jesus for themselves.

It just walks you through the passage and helps you to do that. We'll be holding, as a church, we're going to hold more Bring a Friend services this year so we can invite the lost. And as a church, we'll be running some training courses to help you engage with the lost.

But it all starts with having our Father's heart. If you don't have our Father's heart, you're not even going to try and do any of it, are you? And so do you.

[22 : 30] I know it's not always easy. I find it hard myself. And so when it is hard, then can I encourage you to look at the Father's deep love for you, a love that gave his only Son to die for you.

And let his deep love for you help you to love the lost like him. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for this reminder of your heart for us and for the lost.

Help us, we pray, to do what we can as we're able in whatever stage of life or circumstances you've placed us to do what we can to help the lost hear the word of Jesus that they might be found by Jesus.

Help us to have your heart for the lost, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.