

The Lost Sheep & Lost Coin

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[0 : 00] And I pray that this simple story that we're going to read today is not one that I would complicate, but one that would serve our everlasting joy.

! I pray that in Christ's name, amen. I'm Dave, one of the elders here. If you're new at Shoreline, and I see a couple new faces, I'm really excited that you're here.

If you have a Bible with you, I would ask you to turn to Luke chapter 15 with me. If you don't have a Bible, we would love to give you one.

They're in the back. They already have a bookmark for today's passage. That would be our, it would be a great joy to give you a Bible. And it's Valentine's Day, right?

I didn't know if I would mention that. I'm not much of a romantic. You can ask my wife all about that, really. But today, it's Valentine's Day.

[1 : 00] And actually, it's really kind of appropriate to talk about Valentine's Day in light of the passage that we're looking at today. See, Valentine's Day is all about love. And hopefully, if you're in a, you know, a real loving, truly loving relationship, it's not, you know, a sappy, sentimental kind of love.

It's an active kind of love. Maybe a pursuing love. And that's exactly what our passage today, Luke 15, is all about.

A pursuing love. So whether you have a Valentine this February 14th or you don't, which I know that can be painful in a lot of different ways, there is an active, a living, and a pursuing love that I want you to, and God wants you to hear about today.

From New Year's to Easter, we are working through many of the stories that Jesus told, the parables. Now, they aren't just tales of morality like Aesop's fables.

They're more than that. They don't just, they don't only show us how to live. They also point us to some ultimate realities. Just how precious the kingdom of heaven is.

[2 : 15] Just how loving our Lord is. And he always told the stories for a reason. He didn't just sit down and write a long book of stories without any context.

It was always to a particular group of people in a particular setting, a particular context. And it had a relationship to those people and to that setting.

And so we've been really blessed as we've looked at these. We've always looked at what was the setting. And so we're going to start with that. In the closing verses of chapter 14, Jesus was speaking to a crowd, telling them many things.

And his last words were, in that chapter, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, who responds to that? Luke 15, verse 1.

Now, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him. It's an interesting statement. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

[3 : 20] If Jesus says, He who has ears, let him hear, who would you expect to respond to that? The spiritually attuned people, right? But that's not who came.

In fact, it was the outsiders who came to Jesus. And the religious people don't like it, do they? If you've been with us through this parable series, you probably recognize this cast of characters, the tax collectors and the Pharisees.

The tax collectors were less popular than today's tax collectors. And why? I mean, they were really hated.

I mean, would you admit to me that you work for the IRS? You probably, if you do, you probably tell me you work at EB or something. But these tax collectors were more despised, much more.

And it wasn't just that they collected taxes. It was who they collected taxes for. So Jesus is doing his ministry in Israel, but Israel is not free. Rome, this is the Rome of Julius Caesar and Caesar

Augustus.

[4 : 27] They have conquered Israel. And so they are basically in bondage to the Roman rule. And so the taxation was not just, hey, I've got to pay my taxes.

It's also a symbol of a Roman occupation, a reminder that they're not free. And so these tax collectors were either agents of the Roman government or even worse, and actually this is the majority of them, they were Jews who were serving the occupying Romans.

It was a betrayal. And not only that, but corruption was rampant. You see, Rome didn't actually pay them a salary at all.

It was expected of them to exact that salary by adding fees on top of the taxes. And you can imagine that that is ripe for corruption. Now, on the other hand, the Pharisees, we know quite a bit about the Pharisees.

And one of the earliest records of them comes from the Jewish historian Josephus, which lived in the, he lived in the generation after Jesus and the apostles. And I'll read to you what he had to say about them. He said, now for the Pharisees, they live simply and despise delicacies in diet.

[5 : 43] That's to say they were plain and simple people. Sounds good. And they followed, Josephus says, they followed the conduct of reason. And what that prescribes to them as good for them, they do.

And they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reasons dictates for practice. So he thought they were reasonable people. Excellent. He continues, they also pay a respect to such as are in years, that is, old people.

Nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything which they have introduced. So it's quite honorable that they respect their elders. Great. They also believe that souls are immortal.

And there will be rewards or punishments according to whether they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life. They believe their actions matter, that there truly are such things as morally good and morally bad actions, and that God is just.

Those are great things. He continues, on account of these doctrines, they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people. And whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction.

[6 : 54] Now, it makes sense that people who are simple, reasonable, honorable, and people who care about right and wrong would be the natural leaders in Israel's worship.

It just makes sense. And so he concludes, the cities gave great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and in their teachings also.

And here we see that the Pharisees were well-respected among the people. I think sometimes in church life, Jesus kind of comes down really hard on the Pharisees.

So we're like, oh, these guys are super evil. No, these were like the good guys. These were the seminary professors that we look up to. These are the morally right people. But then, how do they react?

How would we expect honorable, reasonable, virtuous, respected religious leaders to act around Jesus? How? We expect them to run to him, just like the tax collectors and the sinners.

[7 : 58] But they don't. In fact, they don't like what's happening at all. They don't think a teacher like Jesus should set an example of welcoming sinful people who are clearly far from God.

But that's not how Jesus thinks, is it? He doesn't turn them away. He doesn't shame them. Instead, he receives them and gives them the words of life. So if you think you're on the outside, you think you're not acceptable, think you've been too bad, or if too much has been done to you for you to be acceptable in God's sight, let me tell you this.

The Pharisees were right about one thing. This man does receive sinners and eat with them. Jesus is glad, exceedingly glad, to receive sinners.

Why did he come to the world? Here's how he summarized it in Luke chapter 19. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. He's glad to receive sinners and to eat with them, which might sound not like a big deal, but that was a big part of the Pharisees' criticism.

The ancient world didn't have many cafeterias. There weren't any chain restaurants. No sit-down diners. So meals were eaten at home. Who do you have into your home for meals?

[9 : 33] Your friends and your family. It's a sign of fellowship. So when the Pharisees say, this man receives sinners and eats with them, they're saying, we see what you're doing.

You're calling these people your friends. They wouldn't even hang out with tax collectors, but Jesus would enter a home, sit down, and eat with them.

So even if you are as far away as you think you are, Jesus does receive shameful and traitors, corrupt, outcast tax collectors, and he eats with them.

He will receive you if, like the tax collectors, you draw near to him. And the Pharisees who don't want to associate with riffraff don't like it.

They don't like it one bit. They thought it was disgraceful, but he knew that it was love. How did Jesus respond to their grumbling?

[10:38] Verse 3. So he told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his 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. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I have lost. A.W. Tozer is one of the less known but more helpful theologians of the twentieth century.

His most famous quote is probably this. What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

[11:55] Why is that? Well, we treat people based on how we think of them, right? If we like someone, we spend our time with them.

If we don't, we won't spend our time with them. It's really that simple. It works with people. It works with brands. It works with neighborhoods.

It works with occupations, with products, schools, everything in the whole world. And the same applies to God. The way we think about God will dictate how we think and how we act towards him. So it is the most important thing about us. So if you don't have a right view of God, you're not going to respond to him rightly. And I think in our day, there are two misconceptions about who God is that are really widespread.

The first one is very much like the Pharisees' view. And it says the God of the Bible is basically all about holiness. And this kind of turns him into an angry, prudish judge.

[13:12] Or as Sinclair Ferguson put it, a magnified policeman who gives his law only because he wants to deprive us and destroy our joy. A second misconception that I think is really prevalent in our day today.

It says this. God is a God of love. Full stop. He is love, so he wants me to be happy. And anything that would diminish my happiness in the way that I want to seek it is wrong.

And I think those are kind of the two major misconceptions about who God is in our culture today.

What happens if you believe one of those lies? If you think God is a magnified policeman, you'll realize that you cannot live up to his standards.

You'll throw your hands up in the air and you will walk away. Because there's no point. Eat, drink, be merry, before tomorrow we die. Like, there's nothing else to it.

Or if you think that God loves you and wants you to be happy however you want to be happy, you'll have no need of him, actually, because you know what makes you happy. You know how to get it.

[14:27] So you'll just go after it. And so both of them result in abandoning God. And actually, you'll see the parable that follows this one in Luke 15.

It's probably the most famous parable. The parable of the prodigal son. There are two sons, both of whom abandon the father, because they believe these two things. So however you react to a false notion of God, you certainly won't draw near to him, like we see the sinners and tax collectors doing in this passage.

And that's why Tozer said that what you think about God is the most important thing about you. It determines your whole relationship with him. And the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin confront both of those wrong beliefs.

See, God rejoices in saving people. And both of those things, that he rejoices and that he saves people, confront both of them really strongly.

First, a saving God, a God who saves people, confronts the leave-me-alone-to-my-happiness lie. Both the sheep and the coin start lost.

[15 : 50] And both are very, very valuable to the person who has lost it. An average sheep herd in Israel in the first century was about 200 sheep.

And farmers were already poor people. Like, this was not a glamorous occupation. So if a poor shepherd had 200 sheep, what did that make the shepherd with 100 sheep?

Very poor. Every one of those sheep was precious. He needed every last one of them.

Because the other shepherds who had 200 were barely making it with that many, and he had half as many. Can you imagine losing one of them? A silver coin was about one day's wage in the first century.

So with 10 coins, the woman has about 10 days' worth of provisions left. Now, she's presented entirely alone in this passage, which means she probably has no means of supporting herself.

[17 : 00] So this isn't, hey, look, I found some loose change in the couch. No, she's past living paycheck to paycheck. This is desperation.

She's down to her last 10 days of eating. Can you imagine losing one of those? And so Jesus is painting for us a picture of desperation.

These are people who cannot be without those things. The sheep and the coin. And he's saying here that God earnestly desires to save people. Even these unwanted people.

The Lord is a God who seeks out lost sinners. He goes out after the lost sheep. He diligently searches the house for the lost coin.

Because he doesn't want them to stay where they are. And that's what confronts. God's a God of love, so I'm just going to be happy.

[18 : 03] That means that the people who say, God wants me to be happy, so I'm going to do what I want, they don't understand him. Yes, he wants you to be happy, but a lost sheep doesn't stay happy for very long.

Sheep are the least intelligent large mammals. Like, it's preposterous how dumb they are. The lost sheep's happiness comes from its stupidity.

Ignorance is bliss. Not from its well-being. A lost sheep will soon be a dead sheep. It will die of exposure. A wolf will eat it.

It will fall off a cliff. However it ends, it will be bad. And its joy, its happiness, what little happiness it has, will be gone. It will give way to tragedy. So no, God is not content to leave you fighting for your own happiness in the ways that you would seek it.

Like a lost sheep. Because he knows that it's a false promise. It leads to death. And that's why Jesus came. That's why he came to seek and save the lost.

[19 : 14] We need saving. And this search for us was much harder than going out and looking in a field for a sheep. His pursuit ended with him nailed to a cross.

And that is what separates Christianity from every other religion in the world where you achieve your own transcendence when you meditate. Where you earn a God's favor.

where you follow the rules and get what's coming to you. This is the God who comes and seeks and saves and sacrifices for his people.

So yes, God wants you to be happy, but he paid the greatest price to seek and save you. He wouldn't have gone to the cross if all he wanted to do was affirm our own pursuits of happiness.

What happiness is he looking for? Well, that happiness is actually what confronts that other false view of God. The magnified policeman.

[20 : 29] You can tell a lot, you know, about somebody based on what makes them happy. Bullies are happy when they put other people down.

I'm happy when I'm eating chocolate. So tomorrow, February 15th, when all of that Valentine's candy is half off. Primo. Shepherds are happy when they find lost sheep.

What makes God happy? Actually, in the words of this passage, what makes God rejoice? Verse 5. When he has found the sheep, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Verse 9.

And when she has found the coin, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. What makes God happy?

[21 : 32] Finding and saving wayward souls. He loves bringing lost sheep home. He rejoices when a coin is found. The sheep that coin the soul is precious to him.

And if that sounds nothing like a cosmic policeman, that's because it's nothing like a cosmic policeman. 500 years before Jesus told this parable, the Lord spoke through the prophet Ezekiel and he said this, Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord?

And not rather, that he should turn from his way and live. So if the Pharisees had been reading and thinking about that, they would have seen what Jesus was doing.

Now, is God just? Yes. Does he hate sin? Yes. And he wants to rescue you from sin for his joy and for yours.

He wants to rescue you from sin's guilt when you come to faith in him and he saves you. And he wants to save you from its power as you walk through your whole life strengthened by his spirit.

[23 : 02] Now, this is a simple passage. So I want it to be a simple sermon. But before we walk away from it, I want to ask how can we share in God's joy?

Verse 10. Just so I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. First, what does the joy look like?

What does the passage say? It doesn't say the angels rejoice. I'm sure they do rejoice. That's not what it says.

It says there is joy before the angels. Someone is letting loose their joy before in front of the angels. and that someone is the Lord. So it's not a private joy. It's a joy God puts on display. Have you ever been so happy that you couldn't contain yourself?

[24 : 17] I got an A on that really hard test. I'm getting married. We're pregnant. Whatever it is that you couldn't contain, you had to share it because in the sharing of it, it completed needed your joy.

That's a taste of God's joy when he says, rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost. So that's what the joy looks like.

What is the joy about? He doesn't say there's joy when one sinner straightens out his act. He doesn't say when one sinner attends church.

He doesn't say when one sinner gives something up for Lent. He doesn't say when one sinner gives a lot of offerings. He says, I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

What does that mean? Well, in a few weeks we're going to look at the parable that immediately follows these two. It's, again, the best known parable.

[25 : 27] It's the parable of the prodigal son. And in that story there's another celebration just like this one. Just like when the shepherd finds his sheep. Just like when the woman finds her coin.

Just like when the sinner repents. And so verse 10 is going to be our guide and it's going to say this is the picture of what repentance looks like. And it's this young son coming home to his father.

So how do we join God in his joy? If you're still a lost sheep, a lost coin, separated from God, know this.

Jesus came to seek you out and to save you. He died on the cross for your sins and he rose from the grave so that you might live with him forever and share his joy.

God earnestly desires sheep to return home. Even ugly sheep like tax collectors and sinners. sinners. If you turn to him in repentance and faith, I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

[26 : 54] And if God has already found you and carried you back to his flock, rejoicing over you, what does this parable say to you? first, sometimes it feels like he doesn't rejoice over us in the midst of life.

If you are hurting, if you are grieving, if your life is in turmoil, it might feel like God has forgotten you and he doesn't rejoice over you. How could he allow this to happen?

I want to tell you that even in the midst of hardship, he does delight in you. Now, I can't tell you why he's allowing your current trouble, but it is not because he doesn't care.

He delights in you. I don't know what he's working in your life and in the lives of those around you, but I know that it is for your everlasting joy.

And I don't know that in this life you will find out what that hardship and that grief or that pain is for, but this life is not the end of you. It's not the end of you because Jesus rejoices over you so much

that he sacrificed his life for you.

[28 : 19] The second thing this says to the found sheep, the Pharisees attitude, right, I mean, these were the good guys, their attitude can creep in on us.

They say, this man receives sinners and eats with them as if that were a bad thing, but that's the whole point. Christians join God in his joy by partnering with him in verse four, going after the one that is lost until he finds it.

How do you do that? I'm going to give you three suggestions today. One you can do on your own, one you can do in a group, and one we're going to do as a church.

A few weeks ago, put note cards on your seats. It was a very rainy day. It might have been even a snowy day.

I can't recall now. So not everybody was here. I asked you to put the name of someone that you know who is not with God right now, who is separated.

[29 : 45] I asked you to put it somewhere that you'll bump into it every day. on a bathroom mirror, on your steering wheel, on your monitor at work, whatever, so that you would bump into it and pray.

We prayed today. I think sometimes we undervalue the gift of prayer. I think sometimes we undervalue the power of the God who hears our prayers. So the first thing, pray.

And if you would like a note card, you've lost yours, come grab one from me afterwards. And if you see your spouse's card hanging on the bathroom mirror and it has your name on it, time for a conversation.

Second thing, something we could do as a group. There is a pretty large spiritual but not religious community in the New London area.

that's exactly the kind of people who might, in verse 1, draw near to hear Jesus if they're invited.

And so we're going to do something like that.

[30 : 53] We're starting up a discussion group about spirituality and inviting anyone who would like to come and discuss that. What might we seek after?

How might we seek after it? What might we get if we get that? Let them know that Jesus is the great joy.

It'll probably happen at a coffee shop downtown New London, probably happen in the afternoon sometime like a happy hour time frame. If you're interested in seeking the lost with me, come talk to me.

And something we're going to do as a church together, I want you to mark April 22nd and 23rd on your calendars. We're going to host right here in this ballroom a love and respect marriage enrichment conference.

Love and respect, if you don't know, is a book that's been very helpful to a lot of people in their marriages. And so first off, it's going to serve us. If you're married, it's going to help you in your marriage. If you are not yet married but would like to be married, it will help you be a better spouse someday.

[32 : 01] And so that Friday evening and Saturday morning, we're going to serve our own marriages but we're also going to invite our friends and our neighbors and our coworkers and say, hey, our church is doing a marriage enrichment thing.

Would you like that? It's going to be less than the cost of a date and it's going to be huge for you. It's an opportunity for us to invite our friends and our neighbors to see the power of God's word at work in a meaningful way in their lives.

So that's a way to invite them to see Christ. Now these aren't the only ways to go about it, they're just a starting point. But we don't have the option of not seeking the lost.

So talk about it in your community group. Think of different ways that would fit you well to just rub up against people and let them know about Jesus. I want to share in God's joy.

Don't you? Let's pray. Father, I pray this prayer from one of the great Puritans.

[33 : 33] Let angels sing for sinners repenting, prodigals restored. Backsliders reclaimed, Satan's captives released. Blind eyes opened, broken hearts bound up, the despondent cheered, and the saints built up in their holy faith.

We ask great things of a great God. We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Okay.