

Parable of the "Three Losts"

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- [0 : 0 0] I'd like if there were any children here, if they would come up to the front and help me get started with this sermon. I have a couple of questions I need to put to people.
- Just take a seat right here on the... Thank you very much. Now I have a little contest for you.
- Good morning. The story that you heard this morning, read from the Bible, talks about a sheep that got lost and I...
- Do you know what happened? Did anybody hear what happened to the sheep that got lost? What happened? He was found.
- And by who was he found? Yes. By the shepherd. And how did the shepherd find him? Right. By going out and looking for him.
- [1 : 3 1] Now, I have discovered that there are eight sheep in pictures in this church. One of them is a moving picture during the service, so you'll have to be careful.
- But these eight sheep, you see, I'd like you to see if you can find them. And if you can find them, if you will come to me and tell me, then I will reward you with a gold coin.
- If you can find the eight sheep, you'll have to come and tell me at the coffee hour after the service, otherwise you'd spend the rest of the service looking for them. But you can sort of cast your eye around and wonder where they might be.
- So I will give you one of these. And I've got ten coins. Could you count them for me to see that they're all there? There's only nine.
- There's only nine. I must have lost one. Did anybody by chance find a gold coin when they came into church this morning?
- [2 : 5 9] Somebody must have found a gold coin when they came into church this morning. Nobody found it? Goodness gracious me, this is something I didn't anticipate.
- I lost it quite on purpose. And I lost it in such a way that I was certain it would be found.
- And if you look in your bulletin carefully, just see if it might be there because I was folding a bulletin before I came to church. So if it turns up, please let me know.
- In the meantime, there's a story that follows the one we heard about the sheep. And this is about a lost coin. And it belonged to a woman.
- And she had ten coins. And one of them was lost. And so, what did she do? Yes?
- [4 : 1 7] She lit a lamp. I think you better come up and tell this story. Okay. Just tell them the story of what happened.
- Yes. Oh, not gold, eh? You said the song. Well, that's...
- Okay. Thank you.
- I'm going to sing the next hymn now. Now, wait a minute. I don't want you to go just yet. The question I have for you is this.

When the shepherd lost a sheep, what did he do? He looked all over for it. And when the woman lost a coin, what did she do?

[5 : 43] Yes? He looked for it. Now, the third story is about a father who lost a son. And what did he do?

Yes? No, he didn't. That's the question I want to ask you. Why didn't the father go out and look for it?

Look for the boy that had been lost. I don't want you to give me the answer because that's what my whole sermon is about. But I want you to think about the question.

So will you keep the sheep in mind and take your seats again and I will go on with the story. Okay? Thank you very much for your help.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[6 : 43] Now, the story that I have to tell you this morning is not unfamiliar. In fact, I suspect that it is the most famous story in all the world.

Probably been translated into more languages than any other story and probably known by people in every continent throughout the world.

It's the story of the prodigal son. And I looked up in the dictionary to find out what prodigal means. And they said it means like the prodigal son.

So that wasn't very much help. The story begins with the younger of two sons saying in plain words to his father, I want what belongs to me in order that I may go where I want, to do what I want, and to be what I want.

Now, whether the father was wise or not, he gave him his inheritance that would belong to him when the father died normally. So having his inheritance and packing it carefully in a suitcase, he leaves home for a far country where he has a great sense of himself as one who has left home, one who has made friends, one who is living his own life, one who is doing what he wants to do without any restraints upon him.

[8 : 27] Two things happen which he had not anticipated. One is that his money ran out.

And money has a way of doing that, as some of you may have noticed. The second thing was that the land was caught up in a famine.

And so this young man, having run out of money in a land in famine, has to take a job feeding pigs.

He has quite apparently lost all his friends because they were friends of his money, not friends of him. And he finds himself slowly starving to death.

And that's when the story reaches a vital point. The story says he came to himself.

[9 : 33] That means he sat down, I think, with a piece of paper and a pencil, and he answered the question, Who am I? He made an inventory of himself, which he had never done in his life before.

In fact, I would like to suggest to you that if you were to walk along the street and meet yourself coming the other way, would you know yourself?

Well, he came at last in the point in his life where he wanted to stop and see who he really was. And so when he came to himself, he discovered that his life, that he lived his life, he being envious, irritable, rude, resentful, boastful, he realized that he had lived his own life blaming somebody else for his problems.

He realized, I have come to the place where I understand what has happened to me. What I have done is because of who I am.

My irritability, envy, covetousness, boastfulness, and resentment has ruled my whole life. So having come to himself and finding what kind of person he was, he saw only one option open.

[11 : 12] And that was he had to go home because there was something at home that he remembered that he had found nowhere else.

Something that was more precious than anything else he had ever discovered. So he set off for home. And thinking about the moment that would inevitably come when he stood face to face with his father, he prepared a little speech which he said over and over to himself as he walked the long way home.

And this was the speech. Now listen carefully. I have sinned against heaven. This is speaking to his father. Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants. Now I would like you to say that with me and with him as we go back on the road home.

So could you all say that with me? I'll say it line by line and you say it after me. Then we're going to say it all together. All right? I have sinned against heaven and before you.

[12 : 39] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants.

Now this is an amazing statement.

You see? It begins with the recognition that he had sinned against heaven. And not only that, but he had sinned again before his father.

And by claiming his inheritance, he was no longer worthy to be called a son. And his only hope would be if his father would make room for him in the household as a hired servant.

While he's going home reciting this to himself, you have to take, we'll take a look at the father. The father continued privately to bear all things, to believe all things, to hope all things, and to endure all things.

[14 : 12] He looked out along the road every day and imagined that he saw his son coming home and he went to bed sorrowful every night because the son was never there.

And so he experienced a thousand disappointments night after night after night. There was no sign of a son coming home.

Now, if you are a parent, then it's very likely that you know exactly how he felt because one of the things parents have to do is bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things, and experience disappointment after disappointment after disappointment.

That's lots of parents know all about that. Well, the matter stood there and he was in that position.

So, it happens, when the son did come home and was still a great way off, the father, ecstatic with love, ran and embraced him and kissed him.

[15 : 52] And when the son tried to make his little speech, it was cut off and the rejoicing began. The robe and the ring and the shoes and the banquet came on rapidly as a token of the rejoicing of the father and of the whole household that the son had come home.

You see, the difficulty is, while you can go out and look for a coin and you can go out and look for a sheep, you can't go out and look for a son because a son knows his way home and has to choose to come.

So, if you look at yourself as such a child, you will find out that nobody's going to rescue you.

Nobody's going to come to look for you. You know where you live. You know where you belong. You have to take it upon yourself to come home.

That's the message that's at the heart of the story. Up to that moment, the son had only wanted his father's money.

[17 : 19] Now, he wanted his father's love. The father was a very wealthy man, but far surpassing the money he had was the love that he had.

While the son had called on him time and again for money, he had never asked for love. You see, we live in that kind of world where nobody wants our love and everybody wants our money.

We only have so much money in the bank, but love is love is absolutely limitless.

There is a huge abundance of it and as Jesus tells us in this story, it comes from the heart of the father.

See, that's about the way the world works. God, the father, has given us the world and he's given us the whole world.

[18 : 38] We can take it and do what we want with it. We have taken it and now that we've come to the point where there isn't enough food for the hungry, there isn't a home for the poor, there isn't healing for the sick, all the money is not sufficient for all the needs in our world.

We as people of the world need to come to ourselves and see that the limitless supply is of love and money is meaningless unless there is love and unless it's an expression of love rather than paying off our guilt.

Well, the older brother in the story full of envy, resentment, irritability, covetousness was terribly bitter and angry when he saw the banquet proceeding.

The father had to explain to him that the same love was there for him, but he never asked for it. And of course, that's the whole story of the Christian gospel, is that the love of God is there in abundance for us, but in our arrogance and in our boasting and in our pride, never asked for it.

so we've never received him. And that's what the older brother had to learn. We live in a world where we try and get money to meet all our needs, and there isn't enough money to go around.

[20 : 38] We live in a world of envious, covetous, irritable, rude, boastful, resentful people who rejoice when a bomb goes off and lots of people die.

Well, it is Jesus who tells this story. He tells us how love works and how impossible, utterly impossible, life is without that love.

You see, it was Jesus himself who went into a far country to tell the people in that far country of the father's love.

Having come to do it, they bought him for thirty pieces of silver and crucified him. Nevertheless, he returned to his father.

So, Jesus tells us that we have every reason to expect that the father would condemn and reject us as we have rejected him.

[21 : 55] In fact, the father keeps watch for us. Hearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, of you and of me.

the father keeps watch for us and we come to the place of where we come to ourselves as the prodigal son.

May God grant that we come to ourselves and we form in our mind a determination that the father of whom we had once been a son, we will now be to him a servant.

We will serve him with the whole of our life for the whole of our day. Strange thing is when we come to see ourselves in that light, we discover that the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ greets us and welcomes us, not as servants, but as sons.

We want to be servants. He wants us to be sons. That's the combination of who we are during this life. Prayer.

[23 : 23] Just bow your heads. My father, here, I live in a welter of envy, irritability, covetousness, boastfulness, resentments, insisting on my own way, quite unable to love those who love me.

Let me open my heart to you, that you may pour into my heart patience kindness, that I may rejoice with the truth, no matter how costly it is, that I may not continue to live in a lie.

Help me to bear all things, hope all things, leave all things, and endure all things with the strength that only you can give.

out of your love for us. Amen. Amen.