

Lost and Found

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Date: 29 March 2009

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again, and can I encourage you to take up your Bibles that were just read to you, and at the back section turn to page 74, Luke 15.

I assume many of you will know your IQ, your intelligence quotient. I wonder if you know what your CQ is, your cuteness quotient.

When you're sitting down in the front and you see all the children come up, you can't help think they're cute. Am I right in saying that? If 10 is very cute, the kids down here are 10 out of 10.

Someone said that babies especially need to have a high cuteness quotient because they're really so unattractive in every other way. Vomit, diapers, crying, sleepless nights, no thank yous, so they have to be cute.

Puppies are cute, aren't they? They get 10 out of 10. I don't like kittens as much, but hey, I'm not a cat kind of person. But we live in a quotient kind of society where people have different ways of assessing your value or worth.

[1 : 09] You could have a BQ, a beauty quotient, or a BBQ, big bucks quotient. I was trying to think of wealthy. We measure people and we fit them into categories.

We are actually in a quotient kind of society. But you are aware that God sees through all that. He sees us in a different way. The only quotient that God is concerned about is the heart quotient.

There's a beautiful verse, 1 Samuel 16, 7, that sums it up. Man, it says, man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

I find it quite wonderful, actually, that the Lord can see my heart. He actually knows me better than I know myself, which is a great comfort. That's why his spirit can pray when I often can't.

There are always two perspectives. And as Christians, we try to dismiss the earthly perspective, the superficial, and start to pursue the heavenly perspective, where our heart is the main issue.

[2 : 23] When I joined Navigators, the first memory verse I learnt was Jeremiah 17, 9. Now, I'd never heard of Jeremiah 17, 9. I'll tell you what it is in a second. And I remember learning it as a young Christian, thinking, why would you want to learn this?

This is what it says. The heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. Who can understand it? I remember as a young Christian learning that and thinking, why would I need to know that?

But I tell you what, as I get older, the heart is deceitful, isn't it? Our hearts are desperately corrupt. I still don't understand my own, let alone yours.

Jesus' message to those that would listen was simple. We are all lost. We are all far from God. Our hearts are hard. We have rebelled against God.

And he has come to seek out and save the lost. He came to rescue me and rescue you and give us new hearts and new lives.

[3 : 33] Now, if God is the only one that can actually see our hearts, how can we know who really do believe? How can I know if I really do believe?

How can I know if you really believe? Well, there are visible outward signs of the invisible inward change. And in one word, one of the clearest signs of someone whose heart has been changed is repentance.

Repentance is the word that describes that change. And today's teaching of Jesus really looks at this key outward sign of repentance. You can actually see it in the two parables that were started with.

If you look at your page, the parable of the lost sheep ends with the statement about repentance. Verse 7, just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

The parable of the lost coin ends with the same kind of statement. Verse 10, just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

[4 : 39] Joy over repentance. Something has happened in their hearts. Now, these and the last parables of the lost son and the older brother all have as their theme repentance.

Now, don't worry if you're not quite sure what repentance is. That's my job to help you understand today. My job is to teach you what Jesus teaches. Because if you understand his teaching, God willing, then you will understand what it is to be repentant.

And apparently, with repentance comes joy. And I'm yet to meet someone that doesn't want to know joy. But we do have a problem when we look at these parables.

And that is, we're quite familiar with them, are we not? We need to be careful, don't we? Apparently, familiarity breeds contempt. We can assume we already know what these parables are about.

So we need to look at Jesus' teaching very carefully. And what I want you to notice, something you may not have noticed before, is how Luke decided to record this particular portion of teaching that Jesus has.

[5 : 52] What he does is he begins with the reason that Jesus told the parables that we have. And the reason he told the parables we see in verses 1 and 2.

Look at it with me. We're told the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

So, Jesus told them this parable. Now you may notice it says parable, singular. What follows is four parables. The lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son and the older brother.

And really what we see is this whole passage is one great parable, which has four small parables, but all with the same thing. It's the theme of repentance.

See the parts with me. Verse 4, you see, is about a man who loses one of his hundred sheep. And he goes and searches, finds that sheep, comes back rejoicing.

[7 : 05] Verse 8, is about a woman who loses one of her ten silver coins. She searches and finally finds it and rejoices. Verse 11, is about a man who loses one of his sons.

And you see in verse 12, which starts with the younger son, who goes off and squanders his father's wealth, ends in absolute destitution.

But that's not the end of the story. We note in verse 25, we also look at the older son. And he's a fairly tragic figure. He is bitter and twisted about his father showing love to his brother.

You see, the chapter is a unit when you realise that the first couple of verses introduce us to two very common human types that we see every day.

You'll know them when I describe them to you. But what we also notice is the parable ends with those two common human types at the ending as well.

[8 : 13] Let me show you what I mean and then you'll see it, how the passage is a unit. If you look at verses 1 and 2, you realise there are two common human types. Verse 1, there are the tax collectors and sinners.

And verse 2, there are the Pharisees and the scribes. Verse 1, the irreligious. Verse 2, the very religious. Verse 1, the disreputable. Verse 2, the very respectable.

The sinners and the saints. But what we see at the end of the parable is the same two groups. We see the younger brother and the older brother.

We see the shameful, sinful, greedy brother. And we see the hard-working, respectable, obedient brother. Now, even though they appear so different, what is striking in this parable is we realise that they have one similar problem.

They're both very unattractive kind of people. I mean, the youngest son is every father who has a daughter's nightmare. Who would want to have this son turn up and try and date their daughter?

[9 : 21] We tend to romanticise this guy and somehow make him out as a bit of a maverick, scallywag who finally comes good at the end. No, no, he's a rat bag. He's immature, selfish, disrespectful, self-seeking.

And the only reason he goes home is he's starving. He's not suddenly a good boy. But the older brother's not really particularly attractive either.

He seems reasonable. But the way he gets stuck into his father, he is so angry. He rebukes, criticises and complains. And he will not go inside.

He's also an unsavoury chap as well. There's quite a lot of similarities. Now, if we understand that both types are unattractive and all the types in between, what's marvellous?

What's marvellous is that both are still wanted by the father. Isn't that lovely? Both are unworthy of their father's love.

[10:21] But as far as the father is concerned, even though they're unworthy, it doesn't mean they're worthless. No, the best message for both of them from a loving father is, sons, you're welcome.

Sons, come home. I love you. Now, I want you to look again with me at verses 1 and 2 and just explore a bit more about this introduction.

We're told in verse 1 that the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and scribes are murmuring, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. You might remember last week, if Jesus in this passage is eating with the sinners, last week he had dinner with the elite. He had one of those hobnob dinner parties where only VIPs, high quotient kinds of people, were invited.

However, here those VIP people are murmuring because Jesus has left their rather elaborate scene and now is hobnobbing, well, quite frankly, with the lowlife.

[11:30] Gutter trash, drunks, no hoppers. What's the reason that they're murmuring? He says, we're told in verse 2, they were saying, he receives sinners and he eats with them.

Now, you might be interested. I think there's more to this. The actual word that Luke uses to describe how Jesus receives these sinners is used elsewhere by Luke only a number of times. The idea of receiving has this idea of waiting to receive something of great importance. But there's an element of waiting to receive something of great importance.

And so, if you remember Simeon at the beginning and Anna at the beginning are both waiting to receive the kingdom of God. Later, we hear of Joseph of Arimathea waiting to receive the kingdom of God.

And Jesus is portrayed here as not just receiving these outcasts, but he's waiting for them to come to him patiently, lovingly. They're described, you see, in verse 1 as drawing near, drawing near to his teaching about the kingdom of God.

[12:42] But no doubt it was like feeding a bird or a squirrel. They're cautious. Every time they'd ever gone to a religious person before to take something that was offered, they'd have their knuckles wrapped.

But Jesus waits and teaches until they finally drop all their guards and realise that he is not like the other teachers. He is willing to eat with them when they have a meal.

And he treats them like VIPs. I mean, surely one of the points of the lost sheep, if you remember. However, Jesus, I don't know, by the way, if it is a fact that back in the good old days, if you had 100 sheep and you lost one, you'd leave the 99 and go look for it.

We're just assuming that's the case. That may not have been the case. It would have been quite costly. You'd have to get someone else to watch your sheep and then you'd have to go. But the point is, when Jesus tells that story, the shepherd will go to great lengths at great cost to rescue even one sheep.

Every single sheep matters. Each one has value and is precious. In our quotient world, that is not the case, is it?

[13:57] In our quotient world, the wealthy prominent person is precious and gets better treatment than the poor insignificant person who, well, they're a statistic.

But contrary to the Pharisees, Jesus not only taught but practiced every individual is important. That's why he appealed to such, well, non-VIPs.

Low quotients because he says, I'm not looking at the outside. I can see your heart and I know you're hungry. The other thing I want you to notice about the Pharisees who claim to have a heart for God is how they murmur.

Murmur sounds relatively harmless but the word murmur is only used twice in the New Testament, both times by Luke. It's the same word that when you translate the Hebrew is for the murmuring that the people of Israel had against Moses and God.

And if you remember back in those good old days, God had done the most wonderful things and they complained. The most glorious things. And they just could not be satisfied with God.

[15:14] That's the kind of complaining that the Pharisees have. They're not pleased that he is showing VIP love to everyone. Now, I mentioned Luke uses this word only one other time.

I think it's worth seeing where he uses it the other time because you can see that there is a link. In your Bibles, just turn forward two pages to Luke 19 to see where he uses this idea of complaining or murmuring.

In Luke 19, it's a story of another infamous sinner, Zacchaeus, verse 2, who we're told wasn't just a tax collector but the chief of tax collectors, the sinner of sinners.

We know Jesus is on his journey to Jerusalem. He is about to arrive in Jerusalem and die. He is passing through a crowd of literally thousands but he stops.

He singles out this one man and says, I want to have dinner. I want to have a feast at your home. But see the response. This time, it's not just the Pharisees.

[16:17] It's everyone, the whole crowd in verse 7. When they saw it, they all murmured, he's gone in to be a guest of a man who is a sinner.

Even the other sinners were saying this one. Yes, they like Jesus but they are complaining because he doesn't know what he's doing. He's making a mistake.

What are you doing, Jesus? Even he is so bad, even you shouldn't forgive him. Friends, what is Jesus doing? Why of all the people does he pick Zacchaeus, the biggest, worst lowlife?

Well, if you remember the story of Zacchaeus, it is probably one of the most remarkable demonstrations, outward visible signs of repentance you'll see in the New Testament.

Look at verse 8. As a result of Jesus waiting and teaching Zacchaeus, receiving him, Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, verse 8, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it full fold.

[17:30] Up until now, my God has been my money, and Lord, I'm happy now to freely give it out. It's no longer my God. Jesus says, boy, today salvation has come even to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

His repentance demonstrates the change of heart. Why did Jesus do this? Verse 10. The son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

That's why I'm here, he says. I'm seeking out to save the lost. Do not murmur. That's why I'm here. What is Jesus doing?

He's come to save the lost. And when Zacchaeus truly repents, there is joy in heaven, we're told. In Luke 15, a lost, wretched soul has been found, rescued.

You can see it. His heart has been changed. All praise to God. Now, turn back to Luke 15, because that helps set the scene of looking at the repentance of the younger son.

[18:45] When we follow the young man repenting, because that's what happens, you could say there's sort of three stages. This is not official, but it helps you understand it. The first thing that becomes really obvious to him is he can see, at last, he's lost.

Up until then, it's all denial. But first of all, he sees he's sinful. He decides then, I must go back and confess my sin to my father.

And finally, I'm going to change. My life's got to be different. So, if you like, the son portrays seeing his sin, confessing it and changing. First, he sees it.

If you're back in Luke 15, from verse 17, he basically has reached what anyone could have predicted, rock bottom, lost everything. It's horrific.

And we're told in verse 17, when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger.

[19:48] I will arise and go to my father, and I'll say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

And he rose and he came to his father. The first stage of repentance is expressed in verse 17. He came to himself.

It's an interesting expression. You come to yourself. You see yourself. It's like looking in the mirror and for the first time seeing himself face to face and he says, my God, I am lost.

Alcoholics are not in this place, don't they? They said the only place you start to make progress is when you hit rock bottom and you say, man, I am lost.

You'd be interested to know that the word used here for lost is a word that is associated with violence, destruction, perishing. It's not, oh dear, I'm in trouble. It's, my God, this is a disaster.

[20:48] The first stage of repentance for this young man is he sees. He is in big trouble. The second stage is he must confess it.

It's one thing to feel bad about it. It's another thing to do something about it. So we're told in verse 18, he plans to go to his father and say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. There's something about confession.

Ask any minister where someone comes and shares a burden. The confession brings relief. My parents, I'm around 50, so you probably have parents too.

That's got nothing to do with it. But my parents in their generation, their generation believed parents should never admit wrong to their children.

Even if they made a mistake, they should never admit it to their children because they believed admitting that parents, grown-ups, make mistake would undermine their authority.

[21 : 49] Now, as I and all the other children in my generation grew up, we greatly resented that blindness when we realised, hang on, they were wrong. What a stupid attitude to have had.

It certainly was not Christian. As parents, we should model to our children genuine repentance. If you make a mistake, you should say to your son or daughter, forgive me, I have done the wrong thing.

But in their context, they saw confession as weakness. But confession is not weakness. Confession is a major step towards change.

It's actually a sign of strength. Every week in this church, we confess our sins. Now, it is possible you have been doing that for a number of years and not noticed.

It is possible. But we do it. We publicly get on our knees and we say to everyone present and to God, I confess I have sinned grievously.

[22 : 53] We don't do it because we're blubbing, self-pitying little wimps, morbid, navel-gazing weaklings that need a crutch called religion.

No. We confess our sins because as Christians, we have come face to face with the living God. I've seen myself. I've seen the Lord. I do not like what I see in me.

I do like what I see in him and I confess I want to put him first in my life. When I see myself, it's ugly. When I see Jesus, it's what I want to become.

Confession is not just venting. It is seeking then to replace it with the forgiveness and joy that comes from a loving father.

And that's what the final step has. The final step of repentance is when this young man actually turns up to his father and lives out his repentance. I treated you so badly.

[23 : 53] Now I will be your servant till I die. I don't deserve to be your son, but let me serve you. And would you have mercy and at least feed me? He literally repents.

Repentance is often described as turning around and going the opposite direction. His sin was to leave his father and waste what his father gave him. Now he returns to his father and says, I'll work to give to you for the rest of my life.

And his only hope is that his father will be merciful and show forgiveness. Now as we consider repentance, I wonder if you notice the strange thing about the first two parables which mention repentance.

How does sheep repent? How does a coin repent? Did you notice that? So there's so much joy in heaven when every sinner repents, when one sinner repents.

The point is, the focus of each parable in this great parable is not so much that which is lost, but he who seeks out and saves the lost. It's the shepherd who goes to great lengths to find his sheep.

[25 : 04] It's the woman who diligently searches for her prized coin. And it is Jesus who goes to great lengths to spend time, to wait for, to welcome and receive those that come to him.

Like the father in the parable, he goes out to both sons. The father goes out to the broken repentant son, receives him. He's waiting for his son, isn't he?

The son has to come back, but he's ready and waiting. As soon as the son turns to his father, there are open arms. And his son experiences something with his repentance he had not anticipated.

Joy! Instead of his father beating him about the head, his father showers him with kisses and hugs. What an unexpected joy for a broken, sinful son. But did you notice the father also went out to the older brother?

[26 : 10] The older brother is not happy. In fact, the parable ends with the older brother outside, refusing to go in.

The father pleading, come in, but he is angry. There's no joy. Over this last week, you may have noticed that God loves to use the image of the feast.

Communion is sitting around the table with our heavenly father and our Lord Jesus as our brother as we feast as family. It's a beautiful picture of intimacy, the feast.

But in chapter 13, we saw the most unlikely people being welcomed into the feast and those who thought they'd be welcomed being locked out. Last week, in chapter 14, we saw people who were invited and they casually refused.

And even here, the son that you would think would be at the feast, the parable ends, and we don't know if he ever went in. Man looks at the outward appearance.

[27 : 26] God looks at the heart. How's your heart? Can I say that if you lack joy, it may be because you lack repentance.

See, joy comes with repentance, knowing that God lovingly forgives and welcomes you. the older brother was angry with God.

There were things about God he was not happy about and until God made those things right, he was not going to love his father. Beware, my brothers and sisters, if you hold an older brother attitude, if you lack the joy, you may be committing one of the greatest sins, which is not to honour, serve, and give thanks to your father.

Well, I do believe that repentance is a wonderful thing because when I turn, I turn to a loving, gracious shepherd, a father who embraces us with tears of joy.

May we learn from this message we are broken. We have a bit of the younger brother, a bit of the older brother, and the rest in between. We are a mixed lot.

[28 : 44] Our heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. Can you understand it? But may we learn from this and just say, Lord Jesus, one thing I know, I need to repent and put you first.

I need to make sure the main thing is the main thing. I need to make sure first things come first. I need to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything else will come to place. What's sad about the older brother is he had so much to be thankful for. and he wasn't. Let's pray. Our Lord Jesus, we are grateful that you are the loving God that waits patiently, eagerly, to embrace us as we return to you.

I ask, Lord God, that you would forgive us for being at times like the older brother where we are not happy with you. We complain because you are not doing things the way we expect.

Forgive us for such, such arrogance, such pride, such blindness. We are lost. Our hearts are so easily deceived.

[30 : 02] Our minds are so easily corrupted. Grant us, Lord, the joy, the sheer, pure joy of knowing that as we put our trust in you, you can be trusted.

And Lord, reveal to us where we are blind that we may see. For you, Lord, said, seek and you will find. Ask, you will receive.

Knock and the door will be opened. May we, Lord, have all that you have to offer open to us as we repent. May we know the joy of forgiveness.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Will you continue in prayer with me as we labor together as a congregation to praise our God, to petition him and to listen to him.

So as you join me in prayer, we will affirm together at the closing of each section with the words, Lord, in your mercy and you will respond with the words, hear our prayer.

[31 : 06] There will be a brief time of silence after I have prayed before I say, Lord, in your mercy. We begin by calling to mind that we are in the presence of a God who is gracious, loving, and free.

our Father has expressed his deep love to us in giving us his Son so that we by his grace might be freed from the things that have ensnared us and he's brought us into a place of freedom.

With the psalmist and with the prodigal son we can say, he lifted me out of a pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and he has put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to my God.

So, Father, we begin our prayers by declaring our deep gratitude for what you have done for us in Christ. You have brought us into a place of freedom and into a community built upon the foundation of your Son.

You have not only graciously redeemed us, bought us out of slavery, but you have brought us into your family, adopted us as your daughters, as your sons, as heirs of all the inheritance that you intend for us, your children.

[32 : 44] You have welcomed us to the family's table, and fed us with the richest affair. We give you special thanks this morning for calling Muhammad and his family to the gospel feast.

For all these things, we give you thanks and praise. Lord, in your mercy, Father, you know only too well the weaknesses of our own hearts, how we become discouraged, how we become distracted by the many cares of our own life.

With the fragility of our relationships and often the waywardness of our own hearts, help us to repent. Often with the psalmist we can say, as has been sung, O for the wings of a dove, far away I would rove, in the wilderness build me a nest and remain there forever at rest.

Teach us, O Lord, in the wildernesses of our own life not to murmur, but to find that place of rest in your presence, to dwell there in prayer, to bask in your presence each day.

O Lord, in your mercy, Father, we know in our minds that you are a gracious Father, but it seems almost an impossible lesson for us to grasp in our own being that you are slow to anger and rich in love.

[34 : 58] Strengthen our hearts, we ask. Help us to raise our sights to the prize that awaits us on the horizon. Call us again, Father, higher up and further into the joy that you set before us.

turn us from our discouragement into the strength granted by your Spirit as we contemplate what a high privilege you have bestowed upon us to be called your children.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Father, we recognize that you called us together with each other to live out your life in the world, caring for the sick, the lonely, interceding for those who rule us, stewarding this beautiful creation you have entrusted us with.

So, Father, we pray today for scientists, for researchers, for those who spend their lives trying to steward creation well. We're reminded that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

[36 : 18] May, Father, we treat your creation with the due respect. The respect do it because you created it. You've called it good. Called us to steward it well.

We pray for those who devote so much time to caring for our families. For those who care for aged parents and friends. For parents who spend much of their time with children, shaping their lives through their care and example.

For nurses, doctors, other caregivers, for teachers, for grandparents, for youth leaders, for political elites who create social policies which affect all of us.

For all who strive to strengthen the bonds of family in our church and in the wider society. Lord, in your mercy.

Father, we bring to you those in our church family who are rejoicing today in the many blessings they have received. For family, for the precious gift of deep and rewarding friendships.

[37 : 46] For health, for your strong presence in times of suffering and loss. And we intercede for those who are going through wildernesses in their own lives. For those suffering illness, loneliness, loss, bereavement, bewilderment.

Be with them, Father, by the mighty power of your Holy Spirit. Lord, give us tender hearts and eager listening ears. That we may minister well to those who are in need.

Those who long to be heard. Father, we ask all these things for the glory of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Amen.