

## Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

March 5, 2023 "What was important to Jesus. The pursuit of a relationship from God."

### I Intro.

We're well into 2023 now. This year will bring some new and innovative ideas in all areas of our church life. We have seen an increased activity in our children's ministry, and we're working on new ideas for both our children and our students. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

### II Sunday.

YAY A new series. Today, we start a journey towards Easter taking on a big cultural issue. So, let me start there. It is becoming more and more evident that the big "C" church is selling its Jesus given mission of making disciples, in order to gain political power. And no church is completely innocent of this. Some churches are more guilty than others. But neither side of the political spectrum has clean hands. Many are calling this elevation of political power and issues over the life of Jesus, '*political morality*'. What this means is, defining being a follower of Jesus by our stand on certain social issues and how we vote, rather than following the teachings of Jesus. Not only is this perverting the gospel (I know that's a strong word but it seems to fit) but it's also driving people away from the church. If you think about it, our country is almost evenly split politically. And an emphasis on politics as a measurement of faith is drawing unfortunate lines. Young adults aren't leaving the church because it's too hard, demanding, they're selfish, or just want to live a sinful life.

There are many reasons people are leaving the church, but here are the top ones.

- 1. We force them to believe what we believe politically in order to belong.** A primary reason young people are leaving the church is this '*political morality*'. We're basically telling 45-50% of the population in either direction, you have to vote like me to be a follower of Jesus and belong.
- 2. We claim to be a community based on love and grace...and people don't see or experience it from us.** The church doesn't feel safe for people who are different.
- 3. There is nothing compelling or worth giving up everything for.** The church seems shallow and more anti-things than it is for people. People outside of church know our opinions and our stand, about certain issues, but they don't know if we like them or not.

Those of us who get sucked into this practice have to ask ourselves some tough questions.

**If I closely examine my beliefs and definition of what it means to be a real Christian, do I find it to be sprinkled with political positions I couldn't find in the teachings of Jesus?**

**Why is that?**

**Do I find myself more concerned with what my favored political leaders say than Jesus?**

**And...what am I willing, courageous enough, to do to address this?**

This has the potential to be a fairly controversial series, so a lot of effort and work was put into it, to make sure the topics chosen were actually the more common teachings of Jesus, rather than just a list of favorite passages. Research across several denominations was done to find the average of several listings of the most common teachings of Jesus. The premise is; if Jesus talked about this specific thing a lot, it must have been important to him. Hence the theme of this series.

The first topic Jesus taught a lot about is God's desire to have a relationship with us. The scripture passage is a well known one. **Luke 15** is the collection of 'lost' stories. So, read that chapter and we'll briefly discuss each one.

**What jumped out to you about these stories?**

**What do you see as the purpose, reason, Jesus told these stories?**

**What did they reveal to you about God's desire for us?**

We're going to skip the first opening paragraph about why Jesus told these stories. That has to be the filter that we read each of these stories through. But we'll hit that after these three stories.

**1. The lost sheep.** This is such a powerful story because Jesus paints a picture of how important something 'lost' is to God. It's not economically sound. The image of a shepherd leaving the primary flock for just one sheep doesn't make sense to us. Most of us, if we misplace one thing out of many, we'll just chock up to life. We don't have a natural affinity towards those outside of our awareness. And Jesus was telling a story of having a keen awareness for things outside of our circle. Things that were excluded. And...even more, going above and beyond bringing them into the fold.

**2. The lost coin.** This story reinforces the amount of effort we are to put into finding and including things that are lost. Because lost things, people far from God, really matter. We do EVERYTHING we can to bring them back into the fold. Our effort needs to be above and beyond.

The interesting thing about each of these first two stories, is neither the lost sheep or coin had any awareness that they were lost. And that point seems intentional. If we carry this over to its natural application of people, then we have to admit that we cannot expect people far from God to realize that they're far from God before they become one of us. That's a huge truth we have to accept.

**3. The lost son(s).** I made this plural because it was pretty obvious both sons were lost. And there's not a whole lot of unpacking to be done here. The primary point of this story is again reinforcing that lost things are important to God. But the challenge here is that this story challenges our definition of lost. Yes, the younger brother made really poor, selfish choices. But the older brother was also lost in his legalistic obedience. So it seems, even if we're doing all the things our faith tells us to do, we can still be lost. This is what Jesus seems to say by including the story of the older brother who we see never came around and accepted his brother.

### **III Challenge.**

What do these three stories say about 'lost' things? The opening paragraph gives us the framing, and the filter to interpret these stories through. Lost things are the people that the church and religion tends to push away. There's no other way to interpret this. Jesus was being judged for hanging out with what they deemed the wrong kind of people. Jesus is saying that people we tend to judge are very important to God. So much so we must be willing to leave our own comfortable life to reach out and include. **So, in your everyday life, who are people we would consider 'lost' need for us to go above and beyond to include? What would it like to leave the 99 for them?**