



Silverdale Baptist

REACH ~ WHY? THE LOSTNESS OF HUMANITY ~ 10/08-09/2022 ~ LUKE 15:1-32

Big Idea

We launch new venues because of the lostness of humanity.

Getting Started

Have you ever lost your phone?

How did you find it? Why did you look for it?

Our phones are essential and expensive. When we lose one, it is a minor crisis. In the 1st century, a sheep or a coin was like that valuable. And people? People have always been important to God and should be essential to us.

Learn

Why do we launch new venues?

Three stories of lostness.

- The Lost Sheep

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:1-7

What is the context for these three stories Jesus tells? (vs 1-2)

What is the main point of this story?

How is the value of the lost sheep illustrated in this story?

- The Lost Coin

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:8-10

Ask someone to summarize this story.

How is the value of the coin illustrated in the story?

- The Lost Boy

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:11-23

Most of us are very familiar with this story. Ask someone to summarize the story briefly.

How did the father respond to the boy's return in this story?

How did the older brother respond?

How is the value of the younger son illustrated in this story?

Apply

What do we learn from these stories?

- 1. People can be lost.*
- 2. People are valuable.*
- 3. God wants the lost found*

What difference should these truths make in our lives?

How do we show the world around us that people are valuable?

From these 3 parables, what does God want you to do?

Pray

Father, teach us to see the world around us the way You do and to see the people in our world with the love and compassion You see them.

In Jesus' name, amen.

THE JOYS OF SALVATION

Luke 15

When D.L. Moody was directing his Sunday School in Chicago, one boy walked several miles to attend; and somebody asked him, “Why don’t you go to a Sunday School closer to home?”

His reply might have been used by the publicans and sinners in Jesus’ day: “Because they love a feller over there.”

It is significant that Jesus *attracted* sinners while the Pharisees *repelled* them. (What does this say about some of our churches today?) Lost sinners came to Jesus, not because He catered to them or compromised His message, but because He cared for them. He understood their needs and tried to help them, while the Pharisees criticized them and kept their distance (see Luke 18:9–14). The Pharisees had a knowledge of the Old Testament Law and a desire for personal purity, yet they had no love for lost souls.

Three words summarize the message of this chapter: *lost*, *found*, and *rejoice*. Jesus spoke these parables to answer the accusations of the Pharisees and scribes who were scandalized at His behavior. It was bad enough that Jesus *welcomed* these outcasts and taught them, but He went so far as to *eat with them!* The Jewish religious leaders did not yet understand that the Son of man had “come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Even more, they were still blind to the fact that *they themselves were among the lost*.

This chapter makes it clear that there is one message of salvation: God welcomes and forgives repentant sinners. But these parables also reveal that there are *two aspects to this salvation*. There is *God’s* part: the shepherd seeks the lost sheep, and the woman searches for the lost coin. But there is also *man’s* part in salvation, for the wayward son willingly repented and returned home. To emphasize but one aspect is to give a false view of salvation, for both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man must be considered (see John 6:37; 2 Thes. 2:13–14).

Since one of the major themes of this chapter is joy, let’s consider the three different joys that are involved in salvation. C.S. Lewis wrote, “Joy is the serious business of heaven,” and it is a joy in which you and I can share.

The Joy of Finding (Luke 15:1–10)

The story about the lost sheep would touch the hearts of the men and boys in the crowd, and the women and girls would appreciate the story about the coin that was lost from the wedding necklace. Jesus sought to reach everybody’s heart.

The lost sheep (vv. 3–7). The sheep was lost because of foolishness. Sheep have a tendency to go astray, and that is why they need a shepherd (Isa. 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25). The scribes and Pharisees had no problem seeing the publicans and sinners as “lost sheep,” but they would not apply that image to themselves! And yet the prophet made it clear that all of us have sinned and gone astray, and that includes religious people.

The shepherd was responsible for each sheep; if one was missing, the shepherd had to pay for it unless he could prove that it was killed by a predator (see Gen. 31:38–39; Ex. 22:10–13; Amos 3:12). This explains why he would leave the flock with the other shepherds, go and search for the missing animal,

and then rejoice when he found it. Not to find the lost sheep meant money out of his own pocket, plus the disgrace of being known as a careless shepherd.

By leaving the ninety-nine sheep, the shepherd was not saying they were unimportant to him. They were safe but the lost sheep was in danger. The fact that the shepherd would go after *one* sheep is proof that each animal was dear to him. Jesus was not suggesting that the scribes and Pharisees were not in need of salvation, for they certainly were. We must not make every part of the parable mean something, otherwise we will turn it into an allegory and distort the message.

There is a fourfold joy expressed when a lost sinner comes to the Saviour. Though nothing is said in the story about how the sheep felt, there is certainly joy in the heart of the *person found*. Both Scripture (Acts 3:8; 8:39) and our own personal experience verify the joy of salvation.

But there is also the joy of the person who does the finding. Whenever you assist in leading a lost soul to faith in Christ, you experience a wonderful joy within. Others join with us in rejoicing as we share the good news of a new child of God in the family, and there is also joy in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). The angels know better than we do what we are saved *from* and *to*, and they rejoice with us.

The lost coin (vv. 8–10). The sheep was lost because of its foolishness, but the coin was lost because of the carelessness of another. It is a sobering thought that our carelessness *at home* could result in a soul being lost.

When a Jewish girl married, she began to wear a headband of ten silver coins to signify that she was now a wife. It was the Jewish version of our modern wedding ring, and it would be considered a calamity for her to lose one of those coins. Palestinian houses were dark, so she had to light a lamp and search until she found the lost coin; and we can imagine her joy at finding it.

We must not press parabolic images too far, but it is worth noting that the coin would have on it the image of the ruler (Luke 20:19–25). The lost sinner bears the image of God, even though that image has been marred by sin. When a lost sinner is “found,” God begins to restore that divine image through the power of the Spirit; and one day, the believer will be like Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; 1 John 3:1–2).

These two parables help us understand something of what it means to be lost. To begin with, it means being *out of place*. Sheep belong with the flock, coins belong on the chain, and lost sinners belong in fellowship with God. But to be lost also means *being out of service*. A lost sheep is of no value to the shepherd, a lost coin has no value to the owner, and a lost sinner cannot experience the enriching fulfillment God has for him in Jesus Christ.

But to turn this around, to be “found” (saved) means that you are back in place (reconciled to God), back in service (life has a purpose), and out of danger. No wonder the shepherd and the woman rejoiced and invited their friends to rejoice with them!

It is easy for us today to read these two parables and take their message for granted, but the people who first heard them must have been shocked. *Jesus was saying that God actually searches for lost sinners!* No wonder the scribes and Pharisees were offended, for there was no place in their legalistic theology for a God like that. They had forgotten that God had sought out Adam and Eve when they had sinned and hidden from God (Gen. 3:8–9). In spite of their supposed knowledge of Scripture, the scribes and Pharisees forgot that God was like a father who pitied his wayward children (Ps. 103:8–14).

There are few joys that match the joy of finding the lost and bringing them to the Saviour. “The church has nothing to do but to save souls,” said John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. “Therefore, spend and be spent in this work.”

The Joy of Returning (Luke 15:11–24)

We call this story “The Parable of the Prodigal Son” (the word *prodigal* means “wasteful”), but it could also be called “The Parable of the Loving Father,” for it emphasizes the graciousness of the father more than the sinfulness of the son. Unlike the shepherd and the woman in the previous parables, the father did not go out to seek the son, but it was the memory of his father’s goodness that brought the boy to repentance and forgiveness (see Rom. 2:4). Note in the story the three experiences of the younger son.

Rebellion—he went to the far country (vv. 11–16). According to Jewish law, an elder son received twice as much as the other sons (Deut. 21:17), and a father could distribute his wealth during his lifetime if he wished. It was perfectly legal for the younger son to ask for his share of the estate and even to sell it, but it was certainly not a very loving thing on his part. It was as though he were saying to his father, “I wish you were dead!” Thomas Huxley said, “A man’s worst difficulties begin when he is able to do just as he likes.” How true!

We are always heading for trouble whenever we value things more than people, pleasure more than duty, and distant scenes more than the blessings we have right at home. Jesus once warned two disputing brothers, “Take heed and beware of covetousness!” (Luke 12:15) Why? Because the covetous person can never be satisfied, no matter how much he acquires, and a dissatisfied heart leads to a disappointed life. The prodigal learned the hard way that you cannot enjoy the things money can buy if you ignore the things money cannot buy.

“The far country” is not necessarily a distant place to which we must travel, because “the far country” exists first of all *in our hearts*. The younger son dreamed of “enjoying” his freedom far from home and away from his father and older brother. If the sheep was lost through foolishness and the coin through carelessness, then the son was lost because of willfulness. He wanted to have his own way so he rebelled against his own father and broke his father’s heart.

But life in the far country was not what he expected. His resources ran out, his friends left him, a famine came, and the boy was forced to do for a stranger what he would not do for his own father—go to work! This scene in the drama is our Lord’s way of emphasizing what sin really does in the lives of those who reject the Father’s will. Sin promises freedom, but it only brings slavery (John 8:34); it promises success, but brings failure; it promises life, but “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The boy thought he would “find himself,” but he only lost himself! When God is left out of our lives, enjoyment becomes enslavement.

Repentance—he came to himself (vv. 17–19). To “repent” means “to change one’s mind,” and that is exactly what the young man did as he cared for the pigs. (What a job for a Jewish boy!) He “came to himself,” which suggests that up to this point he had not really “been himself.” There is an “insanity” in sin that seems to paralyze the image of God within us and liberate the “animal” inside. Students of Shakespeare like to contrast two quotations that describe this contradiction in man’s nature.

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!

(*Hamlet*, II, ii)

When he is best, he is a little worse than a man; and when he is worst, he is little better than a beast.

(*The Merchant of Venice*, I, ii)

The young man changed his mind about himself and his situation, and he admitted that he was a sinner. He confessed that his father was a generous man and that service at home was far better than “freedom” in the far country. It is God’s goodness, not just man’s badness, that leads us to repentance

(Rom. 2:4). If the boy had thought only about himself—his hunger, his homesickness, his loneliness—he would have despaired. But his painful circumstances helped him to see his father in a new way, and this brought him hope. If his father was so good to *servants*, maybe he would be willing to forgive a *son*.

Had he stopped there, the boy would have experienced only regret or remorse (2 Cor. 7:10), but true repentance involves the will as well as the mind and the emotions—“I will arise ... I will go ... I will say ...” Our resolutions may be noble, but unless we act on them, they can never of themselves bring about any permanent good. If repentance is truly the work of God (Acts 11:18), then the sinner will obey God and put saving faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

Rejoicing—he came to the father (vv. 20–24). Here Jesus answered the accusations of the scribes and Pharisees (Luke 15:2), for the father not only ran to welcome his son, but he honored the boy’s homecoming by preparing a great feast and inviting the village to attend. The father never did permit the younger son to finish his confession; he interrupted him, forgave him, and ordered the celebration to begin!

Of course, the father pictures to us the attitude of our Heavenly Father toward sinners who repent: He is rich in His mercy and grace, and great in His love toward them (Eph. 2:1–10). All of this is possible because of the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. No matter what some preachers (and singers) claim, we are not saved by God’s love; God loves the whole world, and the whole world is not saved. We are saved by God’s grace, and grace is *love that pays a price*.

In the East, old men do not run; yet the father ran to meet his son. Why? One obvious reason was his love for him and his desire to show that love. But there is something else involved. This wayward son had brought disgrace to his family and village and, according to Deuteronomy 21:18–21, he should have been stoned to death. *If the neighbors had started to stone him, they would have hit the father who was embracing him!* What a picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross!

Everything the younger son had hoped to find in the far country, he discovered back home: clothes, jewelry, friends, joyful celebration, love, and assurance for the future. What made the difference? Instead of saying, “Father, *give* me!” he said, “Father, *make* me!” He was willing to be a servant! Of course, the father did not ask him to “earn” his forgiveness, because no amount of good works can save us from our sins (Eph. 2:8–10; Titus 3:3–7). In the far country, the prodigal learned the meaning of misery; but back home, he discovered the meaning of mercy.

The ring was a sign of sonship, and the “best robe” (no doubt the father’s) was proof of his acceptance back into the family (see Gen. 41:42; Isa. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21). Servants did not wear rings, shoes, or expensive garments. The feast was the father’s way of showing his joy and sharing it with others. Had the boy been dealt with according to the Law, there would have been a funeral, not a feast. What a beautiful illustration of Psalm 103:10–14!

It is interesting to consider the father’s description of his son’s experience: he was dead, and was now alive; he was lost, and now was found. This is the spiritual experience of every lost sinner who comes to the Father through faith in Jesus Christ (John 5:24; Eph. 2:1–10). Note the parallels between the prodigal’s coming to the father and our coming to the Father through Christ (John 14:6):

<i>The Prodigal</i>	<i>Jesus Christ</i>
He was lost (v.24)	“I am the way”
He was ignorant (v.17)	“I am the truth”
He was dead (v.24)	“I am the life”

There is only one way to come to the Father, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. Have you come home?

The Joy of Forgiving (Luke 15:25–32)

At this point in the parable, the scribes and Pharisees felt confident that they had escaped our Lord's judgment, for He had centered His attention on the publicans and sinners, pictured by the prodigal son. But Jesus continued the story and introduced the elder brother, who is a clear illustration of the scribes and Pharisees. The publicans and sinners were guilty of the obvious sins of the flesh, but the Pharisees and scribes were guilty of sins of the spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). Their outward actions may have been blameless, but their inward attitudes were abominable (see Matt. 23:25–28).

We must admit that the elder brother had some virtues that are commendable. He worked hard and always obeyed his father. He never brought disgrace either to the home or to the village, and apparently he had enough friends so that he could have planned an enjoyable party (Luke 15:29). He seems like a good solid citizen and, compared to his younger brother, almost a saint.

However, important as obedience and diligence are, they are not the only tests of character. Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others (Luke 10:25–28), but the elder brother broke both of these divine commandments. He did not love God (represented in the story by the father), and he did not love his brother. The elder brother would not forgive his brother who wasted the family inheritance and disgraced the family name. But neither would he forgive his father who had graciously forgiven the young man those very sins!

When you examine the sins of the elder brother, you can easily understand why he pictures the scribes and Pharisees. To begin with, he was *self-righteous*. He openly announced the sins of his brother, but he could not see his own sins (see Luke 18:9–14). The Pharisees defined sin primarily in terms of outward actions, not inward attitudes. They completely missed the message of the Sermon on the Mount and its emphasis on inward attitudes and holiness of heart (Matt. 5–7).

Pride was another one of his failings. Just think, he had served his father all those years and had *never* disobeyed his will! What a testimony! But his heart was not in his work, and he was always dreaming of throwing a big party at which he and his friends could enjoy themselves. He was only a drudge. Like the Prophet Jonah, the elder brother did God's will *but not from the heart* (Jonah 4; Eph. 6:6). He was a hard worker and a faithful worker—qualities to be commended—but his work was not a “labor of love” that would please his father.

You cannot help but notice his *unconcern for his missing brother*. Imagine having to be told that his brother had come home! The father watched for the younger son day after day and finally saw him afar off, but the elder brother did not know his brother was home until one of the servants told him.

Even though he knew it would make his father happy, the elder brother did not want his younger brother to come home. Why should he share his estate with somebody who had wasted his own inheritance? Why should he even share the father's love with somebody who had brought shame to the family and the village? Reports of the prodigal's lifestyle only made the elder brother look good, and perhaps this would make the father love his obedient son even more. No doubt about it—the arrival of the younger son was a threat to the older son.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about the elder son was his fierce *anger*. He was angry at both his father and his brother and would not go into the house and share in the joyful celebration.

Anger is a normal emotion and it need not be sinful. “Be ye angry, and sin not” (Eph. 4:26, quoting Ps. 4:4). Moses, David, the prophets, and our Lord Jesus displayed holy anger at sin, and so should we today. The Puritan preacher Thomas Fuller said that anger was one of the “sinews of the soul.” Aristotle

gave good advice when he wrote: “Anybody can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose and in the right way—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.”

The elder brother was angry with his father because his father had given the younger son the feast that the elder brother had always wanted. “You never gave me so much as a goat,” he said to his father, “but you killed for him the valuable fatted calf!” The elder brother’s dreams were all shattered because the father had forgiven the prodigal.

Of course the elder brother was angry at his younger brother for getting all that attention and receiving the father’s special gifts. As far as the elder brother was concerned, *the younger brother deserved none of it*. Had he been faithful? No! Had he obeyed the father? No! Then why should he be treated with such kindness and love?

The Pharisees had a religion of good works. By their fasting, studying, praying, and giving, they hoped to earn blessings from God and merit eternal life. They knew little or nothing about the grace of God. However, it was not what they did, but what they did not do, that alienated them from God (see Matt. 23:23–24). When they saw Jesus receiving and forgiving irreligious people, they rebelled against it. Even more, they failed to see that *they themselves also needed the Saviour*.

The same father who ran to meet the prodigal came out of the house of feasting to plead with the older son. How gracious and condescending our Father is, and how patient He is with our weaknesses! The father explained that he would have been willing to host a feast for the older boy and his friends, but the boy had never asked him. Furthermore, ever since the division of the estate, the elder brother owned everything, and he could use it as he pleased.

The elder brother refused to go in; he stayed outside and pouted. He missed the joy of forgiving his brother and restoring the broken fellowship, the joy of pleasing his father and uniting the family again. How strange that the elder brother could speak peaceably to a servant boy, but he could not speak peaceably to his brother or father!

If we are out of fellowship with God, we cannot be in fellowship with our brothers and sisters and, conversely, if we harbor an unforgiving attitude toward others, we cannot be in communion with God (see Matt. 5:21–26; 1 John 4:18–21). When they show true repentance, we must forgive those who sin, and we should seek to restore them in grace and humility (Matt. 18:15–35; Gal. 6:1–5; Eph. 4:32).

The father had the last word, so we do not know how the story ended. (See Jonah 4 for a parallel narrative.) We do know that the scribes and Pharisees continued to oppose Jesus and separate themselves from His followers, and that their leaders eventually brought about our Lord’s arrest and death. In spite of the Father’s pleading, they would not come in.

Everybody in this chapter experienced joy except the elder brother. The shepherd, the woman, and their friends all experienced the joy of finding. The younger son experienced the joy of returning and being received by a loving, gracious father. The father experienced the joy of receiving his son back safe and sound. But the elder brother would not forgive his brother, so he had no joy. He could have repented and attended the feast, but he refused; so he stayed outside and suffered.

In my years of preaching and pastoral ministry, I have met elder brothers (and sisters!) who have preferred nursing their anger to enjoying the fellowship of God and God’s people. Because they will not forgive, they have alienated themselves from the church and even from their family; they are sure that everyone else is wrong and they alone are right. They can talk loudly about the sins of others, but they are blind to their own sins.

“I never forgive!” General Oglethorpe said to John Wesley, to which Wesley replied, “Then, sir, I hope you never sin.”

Don't stand outside! Come in and enjoy the feast!¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 233–238.