

Stories
Lost and Found
Luke 15:1-10

Lord's Supper

July 23, 2023

HDBC

Most of us regularly lose things: **keys, wallets, TV remotes, glasses, and phones.** Men are twice as likely to lose their phones than women. **One study concluded that the average person misplaces nine things a day.**

Jesus had some important things to say about lost things. Those things are best understood by looking at three stories of Jesus found in Luke 15. If 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter and 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection chapter, this is the ***lost and found*** chapter. **Sheep, Coin, Son.** First are simple with a clear point. The third introduces more perspectives. Today first two. **Read the text.**

1. The Setting (1-2)

The religious leaders were grumbling about the kind of people be drawn to Jesus, ***tax collectors and sinners.*** Tax collectors were private entrepreneurs who made their money by **overcharging and extortion.** They had a terrible reputation. They were rejected by most Jews as traitors.

The sinners here were a motley group of various outcasts from society -- prostitutes, irreligious people, thieves, gamblers, etc.

So, here is a crowd of **loan sharks, sex workers & radicals**, all gathered around Jesus, listening to him. And the Pharisees were ticked off. What really bothered them was that some in this crowd were **inviting Jesus home to dinner, and he was accepting!** And so, these Pharisees and scribes were saying, ***this man receives these people and eats with them!***

I'm sure Jesus was a bit amused by their attitudes. But He was also grieved. In order to make sure His followers did not buy into their perspective, He told three stories that would challenge the hard hearts of the religious hypocrites and also shed light onto the **outrageous grace of God.**

2. The Stories (4-10)

Three common elements in each of these simple stories.

1) **Lost things**

Each story includes something lost. In the first story it's a sheep. I've read that sheep do not deliberately run away. However, they can wander from the herd without realizing it. Slow drift.

Jesus has deliberately chosen an animal which represents people who are lost, but who never made a conscious decision to be lost. They just drift away from the truth that has been revealed to them. They simply see what is in front of them and follow it.

Watch the sheep as it drifts away. He is with the flock at first. Then he sees some grass a few paces away that looks yummy, so he goes over to it. Then he sees some more in another few steps and moves to that. Then he finds more a little beyond. He is concerned only about the immediate. Little by little, he is drawn away without realizing it.

Every shepherd knows that a sheep in that condition is utterly helpless. Any wild animal, any hostile force, can take him easily. Jesus isn't concerned with sheep. The lost sheep represents a lost person. Like the sheep, they are helpless to themselves. They need to be found.

The second story is about a lost coin. In this story a woman has lost 10% of her savings. May not seem like much, but to her it was important. How she lost it was not important. The fact that it is separated from her is the main thing.

The sheep and the coin represent people who are outside of a relationship with God. They are still entrapped in their sin and bound for an eternity separated from God. They are loved by God but far from being in a right relationship with him. They are like a lost coin or a lost sheep.

2) **Determined searchers**

Each story includes someone who is searching with persistence and determination. The shepherd leaves the 99 and sets out to find the lost sheep. Notice that he is determined to **search until he finds it**. He will not give up. There is no limit when it comes to his time, his effort, his expense. Regardless of what it takes there is only one thing that will end his search; find the lost sheep.

Similarly, the woman will stop at nothing when it comes to finding the coin. She will move furniture, look behind and under everything until she finds it. It will be her obsession. Other things will be laid aside. The lost coin will be the focus of her attention.

These determined searchers represent God who was unwilling to leave us lost and far from Himself. God's great search for us is best seen in His activity expressed in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

Like the shepherd in the first story, Jesus left safety, security and contentment of Heaven to come and find us. He left all that He already had, to come for what He did not have. And to put it bluntly, He came for sinners, outcasts, the shameful, and the guilty. He came for those who the rest of the world would never deem worthy of Heaven.

Take Matthew, for example. Matthew was a tax collector. He belonged to this crowd of extortionists who made their living by overcharging taxpayers, **ruthlessly taking the last dime** from poor people.

He was one of the untouchables of his generation. He had **full pockets, but an empty heart**. But one day there stood before him a man whom he had seen and heard speaking, this man from Galilee, this stranger from Nazareth. Suddenly the man turned and looked at him, sitting there behind his table, with all his money around him.

He could not believe it -- that this man, who was obviously a prophet, should speak to him, an untouchable tax collector! To his astonishment he heard Jesus say, "Follow me," Matt 9:9. And Matthew did. Matthew was like the lost sheep or the lost coin. He needed to be found and someone came looking for him.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who refuses to leave the one out in the wilderness. Like the woman in the home, Jesus has gone to great lengths to find those whom He loves. He refuses to give up.

Henri Nouwen tells the story of an old man who used to meditate every morning under a big tree on the bank of the Ganges River. One morning,

after he had finished his meditation, he saw a scorpion floating helplessly in the water.

As the scorpion was washed closer to him, the old man reached out to rescue the drowning creature. As soon as he touched it, however, the scorpion stung him. Instinctively the man withdrew his hand. A minute later, though, he tried again. This time the scorpion stung him so badly with its poisonous tail that his hand became swollen and bloody, and his face contorted with pain.

At that moment, someone saw the old man struggling with the scorpion and shouted: *Hey, old man, what's wrong with you? Only a fool would risk his life for the sake of an ugly, evil creature. Don't you know you could kill yourself trying to save that scorpion?*

Looking into the stranger's eyes the old man said calmly, *my friend, just because it is the scorpion's nature to sting, that does not change my nature to save.*

It is God's nature to seek, to search, to find and to save, regardless of what you have done or are doing. He is looking for you.

3) Joyful celebrations

It's so frustrating when we lose things. But how satisfying is it when the lost is found. When the shepherd found the sheep, he called his friends and announced the great news. When the woman found the coin, she did the same. Can't you see them doing so?

No phones or social media, but they would have found ways to get the good news to their family and friends. There would be smiles, laughter, relief and rejoicing. **The point? When a lost thing is found it is worthy of a celebration.** If that is true of a lost ring, a lost pet, a lost wallet, a lost phone, how much more a lost person.

I can imagine a scene in heaven that is played over again and again. A person is saved on this earth. In Heaven the announcement is made by the Father that another has been found. One angel tells another, who tells another. Maybe a trumpet is sounded, with a particular tune,

signaling the successful ending of another search. Smiles reverberate through Heaven, backs are patted, congratulations are shared.

Jesus makes this reality clear with the ending of each story. Note ***in the same way . . . Salvation on earth leads to celebration in Heaven.*** And the one who initiates the celebration is the persistent searcher.

In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, there is the fun but fictitious and erroneous line about angels getting their wings. Teacher says everything a bell rings an angel just got its wings. There is so much wrong with that statement. But that is for another time. Here is an absolute truth.

Every time a lost person is saved on earth, a celebration breaks out in Heaven.

3. The Takeaways

1) Lost things need to be found.

We are the lost things. All of us were once separated from God because of our sin. We were helpless to save ourselves. We needed a rescuer, someone to search for us, find us, and save us. Some of us have experienced that rescue. We have been found and saved. We are no longer lost. We have been found. But not all of us. Probably some in this very room are still like the lost sheep or the lost coin. You need a rescuer. You need a savior.

2) Lost things can be found

If you have never experienced what it means to be saved, you can. God is the searcher. He is the rescuer. He is the savior. And He is looking for you, loving you, wanting you to come home. He is not searching for you because He does not know where you are. He knows.

He is searching for the faith in you that will lead to your salvation. He knows you and is longing for you to trust Him. If you are lost, you can be saved. You can be forgiven. You can have a right and good relationship with God. He's watching and waiting for you to take a step of faith in His Son, Jesus.

3) Found things need to be celebrated

It is worth celebrating when people are saved. When people come out of darkness into light, we celebrate. When people move from death to life, we celebrate with them. When they are brought out of the wilderness of sin and guilt and adopted into the family of forgiveness and eternal life, it is worth celebrating. If they celebrate it in Heaven, we should celebrate it in this life.

I few years ago a person got lost hiking in the Rocky Mountains. He was hiking a trail that normally took 7 hours. He got lost. When he was several hours late, rescuers were sent to find him. They were unable to locate him. Fortunately for him, he found his way out the next day. Only then did he discover that the rescue party had repeatedly called his cell phone. He had a signal. Heard it ring but failed to answer because he didn't recognize the number.

If you sense an inclination to get right with God, I can assure you, it is not SPAM. It is God. Take the call. Don't wander in the wilderness.

It is God's nature to seek, to search, to find and to save.
it is our responsibility to trust Him with our lives.

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