



“Lost and Found”; *the parables of Luke 15*

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1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. 8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 "And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' 10 "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." 11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 "And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. 13 "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. 14 "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 "Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" 20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. 25 "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' 28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 "So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32 'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"

Jesus had just spoken those words (verse 33 of chapter 14) that no doubt sucked the air out of the room, just as they have done every time they have been read since that day: “*So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.*” **All. Everything. Total commitment. Absolute sacrifice.** Having done so...*having said so*, who was left standing?

Verse one of chapter 15 says “*Then...the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him...*” Such a call...such a *criteria* as had now been given, had a way...*has a way*, of separating the sheep from the goats...the novice from the committed, the serious from the dabbler. The “religious tinkerer” from the ‘tax collector’ *who knows he or she is one*. For the individual that is not so burdened by possession and consumed by money and status is sure to find his or her way to Jesus long before the one who pridefully believes he is whole and complete in His worldly standing.

Notice that there was no prerequisite to ‘clean up’ or fix their lives before they came to Jesus. They were welcome to come as they were. Jesus said in John 7:37 “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.*” But He also said in John 5:40 “*But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*” What’s more, these that stand on the outside are the first to criticize and condemn. Repeatedly throughout the gospels Jesus was on the receiving end of such. All because he dared to interact and spend time with sinners. Once He even stated “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*” There has always been and no doubt will always be those who condemn Christ for rubbing shoulders with “sinners.” He will never find the favor of the self-righteous soul, and such a soul will never acknowledge his sin or step off his ‘stage.’

Jesus herein begins a series of three stories, all which bear a common trait. They all held players whom began by being lost, and yet ultimately ended by being found. The first story that He told is one that is familiar to many: that of the shepherd who left his 99 sheep to go looking for the one that was lost. His point is made and hard to miss: I must never become so focused upon the “99” that are safe and sound in the sheepfold that I fail to seek after that which is lost, even if it is just one! For when that one who is lost is found, there is rejoicing on earth *and* in heaven!

Such is a beautiful premise, but sadly this story is often stretched beyond its intended meaning. We must be careful to note what the story says and what it does *not* say. Many will condemn a church or pastor for not running after the wayward individual. But there is a crucial aspect to remember here: the text tells us that *this one sheep was lost*. It hadn’t willfully rebelled and run away. That story is coming later! The shepherd went looking for the one that was *lost*, not the one that had *run away*.

The second story is about one lost due to negligence. We can often forget about how important things are until they are gone. That can mean a spouse, a friend, a life standing, or a heavenly one. It can often mean our church or our health. All can be lost because we were sloppy, inattentive, reckless or simply unthankful. So many of our blessings are lost because we aren’t paying attention and we aren’t thinking beyond the immediate moment. The fact is, a lot of God’s handiwork is squandered on issues of self-entitlement and failure to grasp what life will be like without it.

It’s interesting to note that this “lost one” was lost right in the ‘security’ of its own home. Many have been lost in exactly the same situation. For just because they are in the church doesn’t mean they are “found.” That fact has been shockingly revealed innumerable times around here! Just because you are traveling doesn’t mean you know where you are going. The coin was so close, but still was lost. And further, it had no *real* value until it was truly in the possession, *in the hand*, of its owner!

The third story from Christ is also a well-known story. We know it as the story of the “Prodigal Son.” This story of a “lost” individual is the one who is lost because of foolishness and lust. He was not lost by accident or even by carelessness. He was lost because he didn’t believe he could be. This young man was impatient. He wanted it all now and he didn’t care what it cost. But as is always the case, sooner or later everyone “pays the piper” and the debt is called in. It is then we find ourselves empty and without purpose.

When we come to that day of epiphany, we can feel that our lives are over and there is no hope. This man found himself at that place that many of us have been: *at the bottom*. Because of the decisions that he made he now **had** nothing and he had no place to go. He was feeding *pigs*...and that from a *Jew*! I remember a young lady once...on the cusp of essentially an attempt at ‘spiritual retirement’...checking out from the battle and going AWOL with an attempt to still remain God’s kid in an easier and friendlier environment. She quoted scripture to me telling me that everything will be fine. That “*the good work that God had begun in her will continue and be completed.*” (Philippians 1:6)

But as is so often done when we reach for scripture not for correction and growth, but for ammo and for defense, she forgot to read on. For in verse 7 of that first chapter of Philippians, it says “*just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.*” Paul was not on his lazy-boy in front of his TV, he was in jail for His faith and for his commitment to the mission. And secondly, it doesn’t say “everything will be ok within the realm of the life I deem to be comfortable and rewarding.” It says He will continue to work in her. The promise is for what GOD will do, not what SHE will do or how SHE will survive it! It makes no promise of the state of the finished work in her life. The reality is, I fear that ultimately she may not like journey or the outcome. HE will finish...but will *she*? What will the finished work look like?

This young man belonged to the estate (the world) of the father's by natural birth. But it is clear he did not belong to the father in *heart, mind, or spirit*. He wasn’t interested in *giving or participating* in that relationship, but rather only *taking*. He was in it for himself and what he could get out of it. The problem seemed to begin with the words “*give me.*” It seems a world of problems begin with those words: Marriage problems, financial problems, relationship issues and church life issues.

The boy wanted his independence. And indeed he was a boy. Men do not act in this manner. He wanted to answer to no one, not even his father. And please notice that the Father let him go! He let him have the “freedom” that he thought he wanted. Our Father today offers us the same freedom that this young man was offered. God will not hold us captive. The son was able to do what he wanted with his life and goods, his abilities, talents, money, and things. It was all placed into the son's hands. He could use his life and what he had as he wished without any interference from the father. *What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.* Rom 6:21

Once again let us note, that unlike the first story, the boy was not “lost” in the classic sense. When he finally came to his senses and realized that Satan had lied to him and he himself had squandered his time and possessions, he knew how to get home. No...he was not “lost.” He was in rebellion, and to His own hurt. And with that being the case, Dad did not go looking for him. He had to come home on his own, or his return would mean nothing.

The young man’s crucial turning point is in verse 17. He *remembered*. He remembered what he had when he was in his father’s house. He remembered how things were before he took matters into his own hands. But remembering would only bring more remorse and pain unless he moved on the situation. So many, many folks have found themselves in this situation and instead of humility and surrender, they instead have hardened their hearts. And either in pride or shame (or both), they refused to go home. And by doing so, they have signed their spiritual and often physical “death-warrant.” They make a bad situation ten times worse.

Verse 20 tells us that as the boy approached home, his father ‘ran’ to greet him. Such an act may seem inconsequential to us in the western world, but in the Jewish world, a man of age was never seen or portrayed as running. Such would be viewed as a degrading or self-deprecating act. But here, the Father is portrayed as overwhelmed by emotion and passion. His son had come home, and no protocol would keep him from his reunion.

This is the heart and the act of *our* Father, and will always be the response of this fellowship...especially if you are part of the Covenant family here. But in this too, the choice is still yours. Your freedom is still yours. My experience is that most folks in this position would rather spend their lives eating with the pigs than swallow their pride and repent and come home. Pride is a brutal weight to carry.

Let us note that forgiveness was given even before the son spoke. Such is not to say that confession and repentance is not important...crucial even, to restoration, but because God still loves us wholly and completely even when we stand in rebellion against Him. He knows our hearts before we even speak. For it is the heart that repents, far more than the lips! The boy now speaks his heart, "*Father, I have sinned...*" Those can be the hardest words to say in our lives. But it is the difference between Satan's victory and our redemption. The fact remains that sometimes we effectively need to be saved "twice": *once from sin and once from ourselves.*

The Father took him back and restored him to the life he once knew. The magnitude of the sin and failure was not the deciding factor in whether he survived or not. In the end, it was whether he would humble himself before his father and ultimately before his brethren. Whether he would make such an act the priority of his life and let nothing stand in his way of making things right. We must not miss the fact that while the son was "out there" in rebellion, he was still a son, but his dad considered him dead. He was "lost", maybe not to ultimate salvation, but certainly to relationship and fellowship with his father. The joys and blessings of his family were lost to him. And when we do the same, the joys and blessings of our church family are lost in the same manner.

Lastly in this chapter, is another often overlooked "lost soul." It was the young man's older brother, the one who stayed home and was loyal to his father. Because of his brother's actions, the older brother was angry both with the brother and also with his father. He was angry at dad because his dad had so completely and passionately forgave his brother. This son too was acting out of pride and self-righteousness. He did not feel that his father should have forgiven his brother so easily and so completely. After all, *he* did not act so foolishly and there was no party for *him!*

He had been out working in the fields. He was still all about the business of his father. Yet he failed to receive the attention and accolades he felt he deserved and therefore *his* selfish pride had now trapped him as surely as his brother's pride had trapped *him!* Ironic isn't it? How we can 'stay home' and still be as guilty as the runner and as damaged as the rebellious soul. So in the end, they both rebelled against their father. One from outside the house and one from the inside. There was ultimately no difference. Because physical location is seldom as crucial as spiritual position. Pride is a formable enemy in any situation.

In all of this chapter, Jesus is answering the religious man of his day who thought they knew God and His nature and heart. But they didn't. The sinner on the street was far closer to grasping His truth and His nature. Even now we are apt to make God into our image rather than adapting to His. The key was the one who knew what they were, they knew the love of the Father. They knew the blessing of such a home as Jesus.

But the Pharisee did not...he *does* not. God will search for the lost one, seek out the misplaced, and will wait for the rebellious runner. I guess the bottom line, is *do you want to be found?* Dad still loves you, and the door remains open. But make no mistake! Home is still home! The lamb will still have to operate in the fold and at the direction of the shepherd, the coin will still be owned and used for the owners plans and pleasure, and the son will still have to adhere to Dad's house rules and direction. This is not a long leash to allow you to roam according to your own will, and still be in favor with God. It is a story to say, that if you want to be found, God will lovingly and always embrace you to come home and be a son again.

There was a young man a few years ago, a runaway, who found himself looking for a sign. He wanted a sign that would show him that someone loved him. He was an independent sort of fellow. He found that as he lived with his loving parents that rebellion was growing in his heart. He didn't want to put up with the restrictions they placed on him. He didn't like the way they always seemed to interfere in his affairs. Finally, one night, he decided he had had enough. He walked out.

He didn't allow himself to think of the agony he would be leaving behind him in the hearts of his parents. He was determined to have a good time. He found a job and life seemed to be going well. He had plenty of friends and no one to interfere.

After a while, however, life in the fast lane began to seem empty. He was unable to suppress the thoughts of his parents. They began to seem more and more dear to him. He wondered how they were faring and tried to imagine what they thought about him. He could picture his father's furrowed brow and almost hear his strong voice. He imagined a disapproving look on his mother's face. "They will probably never want to see me again," he thought.

Thoughts of home came more and more frequently until he finally decided to write a letter and see if they cared to see him again or not. Soon after writing the letter the young man boarded a train. The destination was home. He was dreadfully nervous. As he rode, he clenched and unclenched his fists. His jaw worked nervously. His stomach seemed to be tied in a knot. On the train he found himself seated by an elderly gentleman. The older man noted the nervousness of the young man seated beside him and finally struck up a conversation with him. Before long he had heard the whole story. The young man ended with, "I don't know if they'll ever want me back again after the way I have treated them. I can hardly stand to find out the answer."

As the train rounded a bend in the tracks, the young man suddenly stiffened. "Please, sir," he said. "My home is just around the next bend. It's right by the tracks. I wrote to my folks and told them I'd be riding by today, and that if they wanted me back to put something white in the yard. If they didn't, I would know that I should just ride on by and never trouble them again. I just can't bear to look. Please, sir, would you look for me?" The man readily agreed.

Suddenly his excited voice broke into the rhythmical clicking of the tracks. "Look! boy, look!" he nearly yelled. The boy lifted his head. Tears sprang to his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. Every white thing in the house must have been out in that yard. The clothesline, the bushes, the trees were draped with white sheets. Snow could have done little more!

Those two parents would not have let anything stop them from showing their long lost son the sign of allegiance and love he had requested. Never did they question what the neighbors would think. It didn't matter if people thought they had lost their minds. What a reunion that must have been!

Those parents had to decide whether or not to utilize their son's choice of what the sign would be. At any other time, white sheets in the yard would have been of no value, but because he had requested it, it was meaningful. The message the son had given essentially was, "If you love me, hang out a white sheet."