

Lost & Found

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[0 : 00] Turn with me, if you can, if you can keep it open, if you have a Bible in front of you, or if you have it on your phone, scroll back to Luke and chapter 15. We're going to work and have all three stories as what we're going to focus on this morning. Sometimes when you're sitting with a friend, the stories that you tell each other are quite random. It's just whatever pops into your mind. It's whatever you can remember in the moment. Ah, did you hear this?

Oh, this reminds me. Did you know what happened to Mary up the road? And you're sharing stories out of the blue, casually updating each other about your life. Well, Jesus doesn't just tell stories out of the blue. We have here three different little stories in this chapter, but they are connected. And they are all prompted by something, by the same thing.

So, here, chapter 15, we see tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus. That's the trigger in this chapter. The Pharisees and the scribes that we read off in the opening verses, they grumbled. Now, the Pharisees took religion very seriously. They believed in lots of good stuff, but they also added their own human traditions and extra standards. And the scribes were the lawyers, the academics, who obsessed over this detail, who obsessed over that thing. And both groups were angry that Jesus would welcome and eat with sinners and tax collectors, that he would be with messed up people whose behavior meant that they were considered unclean, cheats, traitors, lost, undesirables.

So, you can imagine the scandal when Jesus was eating with these people. He even seemed to be enjoying spending time with these people. And even when I say the phrase, these people, those people, what kind of people pop up in your mind? Who are those people? Who are to you undesirable, cheats, outsiders, traitors, people you don't want to be around and spend time with? Are you one of those those people? Here is Jesus with sinners receiving them? They said that Jesus was a glutton and a drunk because of how much time he spent with sinners, with these people. Now, how many of us would get that insult thrown at us because of how much time we spend? But who are the ones responding to Jesus?

It's the sinners. And that leaves the Pharisees and the scribes grumbling. And that's why Jesus tells these three stories. So, this morning we're going to look at a few things to answer the grumbling from these religious upstanding people. He tells three stories with two key lessons. The first one, our God seeks out sinners. We see this in all three stories. The shepherd, drawing from Isaiah chapter 40, verse 11, where we read, he tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. The shepherd here leaves the 99. He leaves behind the secure ones. He seeks out the one who is lost. And it is truly a beautiful message. Jesus does not run from sinners like we might.

[4 : 38] He runs to sinners. Satan whispers and he reminds you of your sin. And you get the idea that God wants nothing to do with you and with your debt and with your sin. But Jesus has already paid that debt for us.

Jesus has so much love for us that he will leave his 99 for the one that is lost. And you have this woman then sweeping around her home looking for this lost coin. This drachma is a day's wage. Doing whatever she can to find it. She gets a torch. She checks under every cushion. She gets a brush to reach down and reach down everywhere. Now remember, a day's wage might not seem that much.

But that's kind of the point. Depending on who you are and how much a day's wage is for you. But that's kind of the point. You might not think you're worth much.

Now when I'm talking through these stories, we could easily be talking about sinners out there. But I know fine well if you're like me, there are clear times in your life where you'll see yourself as unworthy. Unvaluable.

[6 : 06] You won't see yourself as being up to much. You're not worth much. I'm not valuable. No one will miss me. Maybe during this whole time, these last six months, you have felt isolated and ignored, lonely.

No one is looking out for me. But God does. In the third story, we have this younger brother. And maybe you've said at some point in your life, God, you're dead to me. I'm out of here. I'm done. I'm done with church. I'm done with this life.

I'm out of here and I'm going to enjoy myself. And he ends up starving. Desperate for food. Desperate for love.

Desperate for a home. And verse 17 says, when he came to his senses. Now perhaps that's where some of you are.

[7 : 14] Finally coming to your senses. Beginning to see the emptiness of what this world has for us. What it offers us. That endless struggle of validation.

Of meaning. Of purpose. Of survival. Is this it? Is this all there is? Look at me. Lying here. Feeling empty. Is this my life?

That's what the younger son was feeling. I don't know you. I don't know what you're feeling. I don't know what you're going through. I don't know what's in your heart. But it may be.

But it may be. You're sitting there. Feeling empty. Is this it? See how God reacts to you.

See how God reacts to you. He sees you far away. He reacts immediately. Before you even get your words out. Before the speech comes flowing out.

[8 : 12] This younger son had prepared all his words. He barely gets through some of them. Before the father is reacting immediately. With compassion and acceptance.

He initiates the embrace. We might be limping along in the Christian life. You might be limping along in your own life. In whatever way, shape or fashion.

But he's running to you. And we confess our sins. We confess our emptiness. But the point of this story is to let him embrace you with his love.

Let him throw you a party. Because now you're home. So all three stories. And the point is, God is like this shepherd.

God is like this woman. God is like this father. He's looking for you. That's the sort of God we have.

[9 : 16] That's God's heart for you and me today. He's looking for you. He's seeking you. He's seeking sinners.

You might be the coin that God is sweeping to find this morning. You might be the sheep lost on the cliffs that the shepherd is searching for.

You might be the runaway child that the father is waiting to embrace. That's the heart of Jesus here. Luke 5 verse 32.

I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Luke 19 verse 10. The son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

The church doesn't exist to make people a little nicer. Or to impose a certain political view. Or to gain influence and power in an area.

[10 : 14] The mission of the church is to seek and to save the lost. Now this idea of being lost might sit uncomfortably with some of us.

But some of you are lost. You're nowhere near God. And that takes humility to admit.

But to admit that you're lost is about halfway to being found. Because God is seeking those who are lost. Not the healthy but the sick.

But the Pharisees and the scribes, they shame people. They would unfriend the lost. They'd be the kind of people who would move to a nicer street.

Oh, I prefer if my kids went to a good school and played with the good kids. Now those of us who are Christians. The question lingering from a chapter like this is where are we in danger of being or becoming Pharisees?

[11 : 30] Where we don't really want to spend time with those who don't reach our standards? Are you in danger of being a scribe?

Where most of your conversations are a discussion about politics and policies? Or spending hours online listening to podcasts and writing comments about your unique interests in life?

What are you doing about the lost in this world? Many Christians my age, I'm thinking in particular, have lots of unique interests.

We are very passionate about certain TV shows, certain things, certain interests. Great, fine. But the question pressing on our heart that should arise from a chapter like this is, what are we doing about the lost in this world?

Elevating our own hobbies over the lostness of a soul of someone that's right beside us. We have a God who seeks sinners.

[12:42] And our God calls us to reach sinners with the good news that our God seeks sinners. We're to share in His mission.

So where's your heart for the lost? Where's mine? Where's our heart for the kids in this city that don't know Jesus, that have grown up without knowing Him in any way, shape, or form, apart from as a swear word perhaps?

For the new homes, the new housing developments, for the new parts of the city. We make time to watch football. We make time to re-watch the office for the tenth time.

We make time to take our own kids to their own activities. But what about the lost? What about the other kids in this city?

What about the students in this city? In essence, we can fall prey to the idea of valuing our time and our family, attending a comfortable lifestyle with a nice setup in our own life over people's souls.

[14:05] But Jesus welcomes sinners. He's not offering cheap grace, excusing whatever sin that they might be doing, but he also never apologized for getting on the inside with outsiders.

What kind of shepherd doesn't get his hands dirty? If you've grown up with sheep in any way, shape, or form, you know how different they can all be. Some get easily scared.

Some are limping. Some are half blind. Easily getting lost. Some have a downright annoying, rebellious streak. I very often hate sheep.

But a shepherd never gives up on his sheep. That one is still precious. And it might be you need to hear this morning, you are still precious.

You've run off. Many a person grew up going to church. Many a person grew up thinking that they were Christians who had those days where they maybe became a member, maybe told other people they were Christians.

[15:17] They go away to university. They move on to the next stage of life. And away they're gone. Away they go. Away they go. But that one is still precious.

Maybe it's your child. That's the one that ran away. That one is still precious to our God who seeks sinners.

Maybe you've been running for a long time. But our God seeks sinners. You're lost. Limping. Running away. You're precious to Him. Because that's the heart of Jesus. He welcomes sinners. That's the accusation He was given in this chapter.

This man welcomes sinners. He eats with them. Yes. Jesus welcomes sinners. It's the whole reason why we're here.

[16:24] He is looking for you. That's why He died for you. That's why He came. For sinners like us. We are who He's looking for.

The second thing. The second key lesson that we read across these three stories is that in these stories not only does God seek those who are lost but He rejoices over them when they're found. He rejoices. That theme of joy is repeated three times in all three stories. These three are connected. Very often we might deal with the first two and then have something else for the prodigal son the lost two sons whatever it might be.

All three stories are one. With two lessons. Our God seeks out sinners. Our God rejoices in sinners being found.

Three times in direct contrast to the grumbling of the Pharisees and the scribes. Verse 7 He says I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

[17:45] In the same way verse 10 I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Verse 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours who was dead was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. God rejoices over repentance and restoration. Repentance is what this younger brother does.

He comes before his father. He makes no claims for himself. He throws himself on his father's mercy. I was wrong. You were right father.

I trust you not myself. I look to you for everything that I lack. The Puritans used to say repentance is the vomit of the soul.

It's graphic. It's violent. It's unpleasant because repentance is when God shows you, confronts you with your sin, exposing it.

[19 : 01] It is unpleasant. No one likes being shown even a portion of the depth of their own sin. And he causes you to turn to him in all his grace and mercy and love.

And maybe you're thinking, Innes, you're just naive. You're young. You don't know the sin I'm in. You don't know the thoughts I have. You don't know the kind of double life I've been living. There's nothing commendable about me. Well, at least if you realize that, that there's nothing commendable about you.

It's probably the most commendable thing about you. It means you're lost enough to be found. And do you know how sweet and how precious your repentance would be to our Savior?

You're exactly who God is looking for. Heaven doesn't get tired of repentance. You repented once when you were in your teens. Then, years later, you realize you've drifted, you've fallen away to some degree.

[20 : 25] You repent again. Years later, you repent again. Every day, we repent and repent and repent. Is heaven tired of repentance? Every single time a sinner repents, the angels rejoice.

We would get tired of it. In families, when somebody keeps on apologizing for something that they've done wrong, it begins to get irritating.

And you start saying, stop apologizing, stop saying sorry. We get irritated when other people are apologetic. every single time a sinner repents, whether it's for the first time or the hundredth time or the millionth time, the angels rejoice.

It wasn't just Thailand that celebrated when the twelve boys trapped in a cave were rescued, it was the whole world. We were all following every step of the rescue of the Chilean miners back in 2010. The world rejoiced. And that's nothing on what happens when you and I repent. Have you ever had your own parade?

[21 : 47] I haven't. But when you repent, there is a parade for you in heaven. Celebrations like we can't imagine.

The confetti drops, the music starts, break out the most glorious champagne because a soul heading for hell is now assured of heaven.

A soul lonely in its self-destruction is now covered with the love of the self-sacrificing saviour. There is such rejoicing in heaven when a sinner acknowledges their sin and turns to Jesus for salvation. sin. That's why we keep talking about sin. It's not because we're doer. It's not because we're negative, sad people. Although that might sometimes be a legitimate accusation against us. But it's so that it might lead to this greater, all-surpassing joy in heaven and joy for you. that's what we see about God.

[22 : 56] He's a God who seeks sinners and a God who rejoices when sinners are found. If I asked you the question, when was the last time you felt joy as a Christian?

I think many of us would struggle. Are we happy? are you happy?

I ask it to my own heart. The words of Psalm 51 are the words we are to pray and to sing and to plead and to hope for.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation. We're not talking about a superficial, I can't see your smiles and your faces.

We're not talking about a superficial smile on our faces. The joy of heaven, the rejoicing of God, the joy that He gives, it's the confidence that we will live with Jesus forever.

[24 : 12] It's the assurance that we are safe no matter what tomorrow brings. It's the liberation from the fears of life, and there are many fears of life, and the fear of death.

It's the pleasure of a father who is radically for you, not against you. It's the privilege of worshiping, and following, and serving the Savior who willingly died for you.

It's the wonder that we have a God profoundly committed to our joy. That's the joy of heaven. That's the joy available to us.

Not the superficial smile, not the happy-go-lucky laughter of life. It is a radical truth that is ours, that belongs to the Christian, that belongs to his people, that belongs to sinners that have been found.

It belongs to them no matter what tomorrow brings. No matter the grief, no matter the sorrows, and they will come, no matter the suffering, and it will come.

[25 : 25] And it can be ours because God is seeking to find you. He's not out to hurt you. As hurt as you may be, he's not out to hurt you, but to help you.

yes, we may suffer. Yes, we may be pruned. Yes, we may be disciplined as children, but he wants you to rejoice.

He wants you to discover a happiness in Christ that transcends the difficult circumstances. And every day that you cling and trust and rejoice in him during the trials is a victory. victory. It's a testimony of the depth of his grace towards you. Heaven will rejoice for you. Tap into that joy because now we are forgiven.

Now we are safe. We are saved. We are accepted, loved. You are victorious in the victory of Christ. Our God seeks out sinners.

[26 : 36] Our God rejoices when sinners repent. will we share in God's mission to reach the lost, the sinful, the sinner?

And will we share in his joy for their salvation? If not, then maybe this morning we are just like the older brother in this story.

He thought he was the good boy, the rule keeper. He thought he was the insider. He was the nice one, the respectable one. He kept the standards.

He's won the brownie points. He deserves the good things, but we see him bitter and angry at the end. his lack of joy for the lost being found was a sign that something was far wrong in his own heart.

And in fact, they've swapped places. He's now on the outside looking into the party. The outsider is now the insider, feeling the joy of God's rejoicing.

[28 : 02] He's inside the party. The one who thought he was on the inside is on the outside, bitter and grumpy and angry, cynical about the lost being found.

Why is this younger brother being showered with love, surrounded by joy? This isn't fair, he thinks. Where's my reward? Where's the joy for me? Look at what he says in verse 29.

I never disobeyed. You never gave me a young goat. And some of us are like this with God. God, I followed you.

I followed you. I've been good. I served you. You've never helped me. You've never given me joy. So maybe the most difficult thing this morning is to see yourself as the older brother and admit that you're just as far away, just as lost, as a stereotypical sinner on the run.

Those who think they're on the inside, sitting in, living up to the standards, spirits, but who are bitter and who have no joy at the idea of the lost being found.

[29 : 30] Maybe we're just as far away, just as lost, and the hardest thing will be to admit that I'm a sinner in need of grace too, and our lack of joy shows that we don't understand just how gracious God is.

The grumbling of the Pharisees and the lack of joy at the wonder of God's grace finds its way into the story, but maybe it finds its way into our story too.

And Jesus ends the stories there. That's it. We've read the whole chapter. We've read it earlier. All three stories are done. We don't know how the Pharisees and the scribes respond.

We don't know how the sinners in the story respond to Jesus telling. He's with them. They're with him. He tells these three stories. We don't know what they say.

We don't know what the Pharisees and the scribes say. Jesus leaves it open-ended. So that you and me can consider for ourselves, what do I do with the stories of Jesus' lavish grace and his joy where he seeks and finds sinners like me?

[31 : 00] if you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling you, looking for you, you need to finally respond.

If you're a Christian hearing the voice again and you're reminded of the sins you've ignored, you've kept hidden, you've lied about, then God is calling you to know the joy of repentance again.

But whoever you are, if you don't come, it's not because God wasn't able to find you. It's because you refuse to see yourself as lost enough to be found.

Amen. May the Lord bless to us these thoughts. We're going to