

Lost And Found.

Text: Luke 15:8-32

1) The Parables

Suggested Hymns:

2) The meaning of the Parables

387, 353, 237, 293, 170

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 15:11-32, 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.'"* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Luke chapter 15 is a beautiful and comforting chapter of a sermon of our blessed Lord, preached to an audience of the respectable people of His day, the scribes and Pharisees.

Listening to it also, and no doubt deriving considerably more benefit from it, are some disreputable citizens, whom the Evangelist succinctly describes as *"tax-collectors and sinners."* Our Lord had been absorbed in dealing with these outcasts, and they likewise had been absorbed in what Jesus had to say.

Their conversation is disturbed by the advent of the moral consciences of the community, the scribes and Pharisees, who, having come near, whisper to one another, *"This man receives sinners and eats with them."* This smug, self-righteous remark is overheard by Christ, who breaks off the conversation with His immoral audience, to address some words to His accusers.

These words form the sermon of Luke chapter 15. There are three parables here, the first two form the Gospel for today, and the third being the well-known story of the two sons, generally called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Each of these three parables has to do with the recovery of something that was lost, and that is why the theme of the sermon is *Lost and found*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Parables

As pegs on which to hang our thoughts, we may take the subjects of the three parables - “*A hundred sheep ... ten pieces of silver ... two sons.*” You will note, first of all, that there is an order of climax in these figures and in the parables.

In the first case the loss is one per cent, a trifle; in the second ten per cent, more serious; in the last, fifty per cent, heartbreaking.

There are two ways of looking at this. On the one hand, in each successive case there is a higher proportionate loss and therefore more anxiety and a greater sense of deprivation on the part of the loser.

But on the other hand, the reverse of the picture is that there was an eagerness to regain what was lost and a wonderful joy in finding, not only in the case of the fifty-per-cent loss, not only in the ten per cent, but even in the one per cent loss.

We would expect the father to welcome home his wayward son. He had only two boys, and the one who had stayed at home was a surly sort of fellow. The returning prodigal was the baby of the family; he had learned his lesson; and the household was reunited.

We would also expect the woman to search for her lost coin, even though it was not of great value. Still, she had only ten silver coins altogether, and a one coin represented a considerable part of that.

When we come to the shepherd, we think that he had less reason than the other two to become anxious over his loss and search diligently for it. He might have said, “*One sheep out of a hundred does not matter much. I still have ninety-nine.*” But he went to look for it and was very happy when he found it.

2. The Meaning Of The Parables

Now, the point is this, that, on the one hand, God, in seeking lost souls, undoubtedly recognises a difference between them as far as their usefulness in His kingdom is concerned.

There are individuals of great talent, intelligence, genius, wealth, who, if they are lost to the Church, represent a great loss, because of the great contribution they might make to the Church's life.

God recognises the unusual gifts that some people have to bring to Him; otherwise He would not have appeared to Saul on the Damascus road and to many others like Saul since that day.

If a fifty percent person is lost to the Church, that loss is keenly felt; if a one percent person goes, he is not missed so much.

But, on the other hand, the attitude of the shepherd who finds the one sheep lost, out of a hundred is the same as the father's who had lost one son out of two. In each case there is great rejoicing. Why?

Simply because what had been lost is found. The proportionate value makes little difference. In all three parables what mattered to the loser was not how much he had kept, but what he had lost. The bare fact that something was gone — that and nothing else — moved the shepherd to search the countryside, the woman her house, and the father to run to meet his prodigal son.

So it is with our Saviour. The expansion of modern science has made individuals like you and me seem exceedingly small in the universe. And we are. Specks in the vastness of space, fleeting shadows in the march of time.

But that is not the point, says our Lord in the parables. The point is not how insignificant we are, but that we are lost. The Bible says in Matthew 18:11, "*For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*" To seek to save that which is lost our loving Saviour has come into the world, and as the sinners' Substitute He has shed His blood and given His life in atonement for the sins of the world.

And during His earthly journey the Saviour kept looking for, finding, and receiving not only those outstanding leaders, of which there are so few, but also those ordinary people of whom there are so many — even those who are for one reason or another cut off from society, such as those in prison.

With Christ, then, the important thing is not the degree of a man's intelligence, artistic genius, or financial resources, but simply his state of separation from God. Jesus is the Redeemer not only of philosophers, artists, and financiers, but of all lost and condemned creatures.

And that includes everyone. It includes you and me. These parables are addressed to us who are in the Church of God in a threefold sense, Firstly, as

lost souls which Christ the Saviour has found, to the great joy of the angels in heaven, so that we might be properly grateful for our salvation.

Secondly, as found souls which might again become lost, so that we may always be on our guard. And Thirdly, as found souls whose business it now is, in the name of Christ, to find other lost souls for Him, so that we might be active as missionaries.

Considering, then, our relationship to God, it will be of help to consider how souls are lost and how they are found.

There are people who become lost to God as the sheep became lost to the shepherd. It did not do so intentionally. It was merely heedless, careless, and stupid. It knew only that the grass was sweet and that there, ahead, was another tuft, and it went after that. So it nibbled itself out of the shepherd's care and out of the flock's companionship. It behaved, in short, like the unthinking animal that it was.

Now, there are thousands of people like that — indeed, all of us are to some extent. They do not intend any mischief, they do not deliberately rebel or transgress or wander; but they live animal lives. An animal has no foresight, its inclinations are restrained by no sense of obligation, it has no wisdom, only appetite.

Many people live like this, living only according to appetite and inclination, without foresight except of the material good which they expect to get. Thus going after tufts of grass, they wander further and further from the Good Shepherd and find themselves deprived of His guidance and of the society of His flock.

We need say no more about this. The world is full of these people, who behave like animals, whose goal in life is to satisfy the desires of the flesh and the mind — their presence all around us ought to be at once, a warning and a challenge.

In the second parable the coin was lost, although not through its own carelessness, but through the carelessness of another. The woman let it slip from her fingers onto a floor that was not very clean.

Now, of course, there is this difference between the coin and ourselves, we have a responsibility, while the coin does not. We are not dead material to which no blame attaches for being lost. But there are those who, while morally responsible, are more sinned against, than sinning themselves.

An appalling number of souls are lost through the indifference of responsible parties. Parents, teachers, even pastors are particularly guilty of this. Each year church records bring the sad information that So-and-So has fallen away, and we know not where.

Souls of children are lost to God and to the Church for no other reason than that their parents cared nothing whether their children were Christians or not. Sometimes others, older people, are likewise lost because of the unthinking coldness and indifference of people who are supposed to reflect the love of God.

The coins of God are in your hand and mine. We have no business letting any of them slip and roll off into some dark corner, away from the light of Christ's Gospel.

Scripture says in Luke 17:1, ***"It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!"*** It is a terrible thing to be responsible for the loss of an immortal soul. And church members, by their callousness to human needs and their carelessness of others' welfare, are more guilty of this sin than they like to think.

In the third place, there are those who are lost as the Prodigal Son was, through wilful determination to do as they please.

The stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin only partially explain man's lost state, and modern thinkers, who dislike the idea of sin, are apt to seize upon these two and to observe that the sheep was not bad, but lost only through ignorance, and that the coin was lost only because of natural laws; it fell by gravity and rolled away by momentum.

So it is said that people are what they are, and do what they do, through no fault of their own. They are naturally inclined in one direction, and their destiny is further shaped by circumstances.

But what about the third part of our Lord's sermon? Clearly His teaching to intelligent, responsible people is this, - do not follow inclinations, like a silly

sheep; do not roll away, in obedience to natural laws, like the coin; and do not rise up rebelliously, kicking against divine control, and wilfully separate yourself from God, like the Prodigal Son.

The son knew it was himself, and not something outside of himself that was responsible. He said, ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ”*** ***“and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.***

The teaching is clear. The state of lost man is not explained unless we recognise the fact a lost soul has wilfully chosen to be away from God rather than with Him. Such a person prefers to live his own life, and for that choice of rebellion and separation he must suffer the consequences and pay the just penalty.

To make the list complete, we should finally note that there is one other person in the story who was lost, and that was the prodigal’s brother, who stayed at home. True, he was with his father and not with the swine in some far-off country.

But he was not of the same mind and heart with his father, and that made him just as much lost, as if he had been on the other side of the earth. Separation from God is spiritual, not physical. To bring the body into church regularly avails nothing if the spirit does not enter into communion with the Father in heaven.

The second son stayed at home, but he had no love either for his father or his brother. So, many people are at home in the Church, but somehow their religion is cold, loveless, and selfish, and one suspects that the only reason they stay is that they like to be respectable. Our Lord, in telling the parable, shows that this stay-at-home son typifies the Pharisees, who loved neither God nor man, but only themselves. These Pharisees are still outwardly in the Church of God.

For these Pharisees nothing can be done. Even God Himself can do no more than He has done already. As the father says in the story, ***“Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.”*** If what such a person possesses and enjoys in the Church does not melt his cold soul, nothing will. Christ has done what He could to find the Pharisee, but the wall of self-centredness which the Pharisee has built around himself has effectively kept Christ out. The Pharisee is lost.

But the Prodigal is found. How? By way of the bitter road of contrition. When he had used up his resources, it is written that *“he came to himself.”* No more rebellion. No excuses. No blaming his condition on heredity or the environment. Simply a resolve to say, *“Father, I have sinned.”* Thus he came home, and thus, as a penitent sinner, he was received. And our Lord says there was great rejoicing in that household because the son who had been lost was now found.

Well, what does all this mean for us? As we have said, three things. First, that those of us who are found ought to be a good deal more grateful than we are, that Christ has found us and we have found Christ. Let each of us examine ourselves to see whether we are truly thankful that the Saviour has rescued us from the fate of being eternally lost, or whether we are merely staying in the Father’s house because that appears to be the thing to do.

Second, we ought to be warned by this sermon of our Lord that the danger of being lost is always present. Examples of coins or disobedient sons could be multiplied. That may happen to any of us. Therefore we need to be on our guard.

Thirdly, we ought to be a good deal more concerned about the lost than we are. God is. So are His holy angels. But we all have the germ of Pharisaism within us. We are prone to turn up our noses and say, *“This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”*¹

We have, however, the example of our holy Saviour, who did that very thing, because He loved His brethren, no matter who they were. Christ has found us, and we ought, as His instruments, find others who are still lost. To that end may the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and love. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 15:2