

The Search For The Lost.

Text: Luke 15:1-10

Suggested Hymns:

231, 342, 170, 237, 297

1) The Search On The Saviour's Part

2) The Search On The Part Of The Church

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 15:1-10, 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.*" (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

There are two kinds of people — the righteous who believe themselves sinners, and the sinners who believe themselves righteous.

Lost and found, and found and lost. There are both kinds in our text. There were the Tax Collectors who drew near to Jesus and heard Him, and turned their

backs on their past lives and repented. They stood condemned before court of their own conscience, yet were righteous in God's sight by grace, through faith.

Then there were the Pharisees who murmured against Jesus' goodness. ²... *the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."* Their lives were untarnished in the eyes of world, and they believed themselves righteous, but were in reality burdened with the great weight of unforgiven sins.

The result was that the Holy One of God could not fellowship with the Pharisees and scribes. Neither could He let their insinuation go unchallenged that He was lowering Himself to standards of Tax Collectors and sinners by continuing His blessed mission among them.

The entire chapter is a strong defence of our Saviour's position. He judges the critics out of their own mouth, while with words more enduring than marble and more precious than gold, He comforts the weak and the penitent who thought that they were utterly lost, but are actually found.

The theme for today is "*The Search for the Lost.*" May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Search On The Saviour's Part.

The object of His quest. We are given a striking picture in our text. 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?"*

It is the picture of the great and good Shepherd, great, because of His loving interest in lowliest member of flock; and good, because of His self-denial and perseverance in the search for the lost.

The lost sheep may be taken individually, to mean one sinner, and collectively, many sinners. We read in John 10:11, ¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.* And in Isaiah 53:6, ⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

When a sheep is lost; when it has escaped the shepherd's tender care, and after a time of careless wandering, cannot find again the cooling springs, the

green pastures, the safe trails; when it is far away from the sheltering pens, exhausted from weariness, fear, and burning with thirst, — unless it is that the shepherd finds it, nothing can save it from the vultures wheeling above or the wolves gathering in the thicket.

When some one has wandered away from God, avoiding the gentle staff of His Word, breaking through the fence of the Law, forsaking the green pastures of the Gospel and the refreshing springs of prayer, there is little hope for his salvation unless the Good Shepherd finds him.

When a certain evangelist disappeared a great search was on. Planes flew overhead, boats skimmed over the surface of the bay, divers groped on the bottom of the sea, people searched the beach, high-powered cars raced over nearby mountain and valley roads, and searching parties scoured the hills, all revealing a zeal worthy of a better cause.

Another example. People searched for the Southern Cross until it was found without supplies on a lonely mud-flat out off of Australia. In each case, it was a search for leaders or prominent people among men.

But in our text today it is a search for the lowly, the despised, and the rebellious people among men. This is joyous and blessed news for a world of lost sinners that, while there is life, the search is on. This is your time of grace. It only ends at death.

The Searcher is no less than the Good Shepherd from heaven, who came to seek and to save that which was lost. We read in Luke 19:10, *¹⁰ for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” And in 1 Timothy 1:15, *¹⁵ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* There is nobody who is too long lost, and there is none too far gone, to be the object of our Saviour’s quest.

The salvation Jesus’ offers. According to an Arabian proverb, sin has five fingers. Two, for the eyes that they may not see the earnestness of purpose in God’s commands nor the ugliness and deceitfulness of sin, which comes in with laughter and goes out with shame and weeping. Two, for the ears that they may be deaf to every word of warning. And finally One, for the mouth that it may voice no objection.

The Bible uses stronger language: the sinner is spiritually blind, deaf, and dumb in the natural state. He is utterly helpless, lost, sold, and dead in sin.

The story of a wealthy Hindu who boarded a ship at Bombay was loaded down with chains. He could only move about with the help of servants. He could never know any peace or comfort. He was squatted on the deck in midst of chains.

He explained that, while still a young man, he had vowed to put on a link for every sin he committed. Now he was helpless under the cruel weight of six hundred pounds.

It is the blessed message of the Gospel that Jesus Christ has broken the dread fetters of superstition, fear, sin, death, and hell. Jesus has atoned for our transgressions with the crimson blood that trickled down the tree of the cross.

We read in 1 Peter 1:18–19, ¹⁸ *knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ...* ¹⁹ *but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

Every one who looks to Jesus in faith is a sheep that is found. As our text says, ⁵ *And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

The hymnist wrote,¹

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

The happy end of the search. Note that the shepherd's tender care does not end with the finding of the sheep nor with the first joyous gathering of it in his arms. He does not reprimand it or attempt to drive it home.

Cheerfully the Good Shepherd adds its weight to his own, walks back all that weary way which the lost sheep had so carelessly wandered. He finds joy in his toil. The added weight is the burden of love. He is not content until he has brought the strayed one safely home and made known the happy end of the search.

Our text says, 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!'*

The application is given in the next verse, 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.*

The Saviour's home is heaven. He must sustain and carry us all the way. He Himself is the Way. The Self-righteous, who think that they need no repentance, will remain out in wilderness of this world.

Jesus says in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.* But coming to the Father by Him, we are assured of a kindly, joyous welcome.

The hymnist continued,

Rejoice! I have found My sheep!
And the angels echoed around the throne,
Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!

Another hymnist wrote²

Though dark be the way, with eyes of faith,
We gaze on His Cross above;
And, lo! from each heart, The shadows depart,
As we list to His words of love.
Rest, rest to the weary, Peace, peace to the soul;
Though life may be dreary, Earth is not thy goal,
O lay down thy burden, O come unto Me,
I will not forsake thee, Though all else should flee.

2. The Search On The Part Of The Church.

The scope of the second parable. Some people assume that the parable of the lost piece of silver is identical in all points with that of the lost sheep. And, it is true, they convey the same general meaning. The search is much the same from the seeking to the finding and to the rejoicing.

Our text reads, 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.”*

Yet there is a difference. The Saviour never lost a sheep through any fault or neglect on His part. We read in John 18:9, *“Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.”* The sheep was lost, *‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’* The sheep wandered away of its own volition. It had freedom and power to go if it wanted to.

This however, cannot be said of the lost piece of silver. It could not run away. It could not lose itself. The responsibility rather rested on the woman. *‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’* Through some carelessness or forgetfulness on her part she lost it.

We cannot, therefore, identify the woman with Christ, as we do the shepherd in first parable. The woman rather is the Church. The Bible uses that picture consistently. The Church is a source of comfort and hope to numberless sinners, but not perfect like her Master.

Sometimes she is fearful, sometimes overconfident, misguided, in error, careless, neglectful, and loses a soul here and there. But so long as she is the Church of Christ, she will never give up the search for the lost.

Luther commented, *“This parable of the woman deals with the Christian Church, which holds the office of the holy ministry to this purpose, that the poor sinners may be called to repentance and may be saved from eternal death and damnation.”*

The Church can never forget that every human soul is a creation of God and originally bore His image. The lines have become defaced since the Fall, just as the image on the long lost coin becomes corroded; yet she will light the candle of God’s Word, proclaim the message of redemption, and shine God’s Word into the dark corners of the earth.

Where she has failed, she will sweep the house, go down on her knees in the slums and lanes of the city in search of souls that belong to Jesus. As our text says 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?”***

The Church counts it all as a labour of love, brings sacrifices, and bears burdens cheerfully for the Saviour’s sake, until she begins to reflect His glory.

What is your part in this search for the lost? as a member of this congregation? and as an individual in the Church? Are you searching diligently? shining? holding the candle so it can be seen? leading the way? and glorifying God with your life?

A friendless boy who had known nothing but unkindness and want from his earliest childhood lay ill with a fever. A certain Christian heard of his great need, went to see him, spoke to him kindly, cooled his brow, brought him medicine, food, fruit, and told him of the heavenly Father.

After a long wondering silence, the child asked timidly: *“Sir, are you Jesus?”* The purpose of the Church on earth is to carry on our Saviour’s work, reflect His goodness, comfort the forsaken, regain the erring, find the lost, and lead the poor, groping souls to Jesus.

The joy of success. When a sinner has been found after a long and diligent search and the silver of his soul shines forth above the dross of sin and something of the divine image is restored by the water of Holy Baptism and the cleansing power of Christ’s atoning blood, there is much cause for rejoicing on earth and among the angels of God in heaven.

Our text says, ¹⁰ ***Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*** Particularly when one who has been lost through some unkindness or unpleasant situation in the Church is won back through fervent prayer, kind admonition, personal appeal, we taste the joy of success. We read in James 5:20, ²⁰ ***let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.***

The sinner found becomes a saint, past transgressions are blotted out for Jesus' sake. As long as faith and repentance endures, God forgives him his trespasses.

Oh, let us rejoice over every precious, blood-bought soul that is found through the blessed ministry of the Church! And as members of that great invisible company of saints which constitutes the Bride of Christ, let us help to maintain her diligent search for the lost, and ourselves appreciate the loving instructions, warnings, gifts, and blessings with which she has surrounded us. Amen.

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

¹ Elizabeth C. Clephane, "The Ninety and Nine"

² Henry Vaughan, Calvary