

## INTRODUCTION

What are the greatest chapters in the Bible? If I compiled a top five list, I think Psalm 23 would be near the top, along with Romans 8, and the third chapter of John. I would also add Luke 15 to the short list of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible. It contains three parables about things that were lost and then found. The first parable is about a lost sheep and the shepherd who goes out to rescue it. The second parable is about a lost coin and the woman who searched frantically for it. The third story is called the Prodigal Son and is the most familiar of the three. It's about a son who becomes lost to his father. The theme connecting these three parables is when that which is lost is found, there is great rejoicing. Over the next few weeks, we are going to be examining these three parables. Today, we'll look at the first two parables, and then I'll spend three weeks speaking on the parable of the Prodigal Son. Let's begin reading in verse 1:

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

There were two different groups present in Jesus' audience. The Pharisees and teachers of the law had become the enemies of Jesus by this time. They followed him around looking for a reason to condemn Him. These religious fanatics were so scrupulous in their observance of the law; they would never sit down and eat with "sinners" like tax collectors and common men. Jesus didn't share their scruples, so He was always hanging out with the outcasts and rejected people. The words of Jesus made the religious crowd so angry, they were going to eventually crucify Him in the name of their religion. But the Bible says the common people heard Jesus gladly—they rejoiced in His words! We need to be on guard constantly so we don't become so self-righteous that we begin to exclude people who aren't just like us. When we do, we become exactly like those Pharisees. Look at their criticism of Jesus: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." My response to that is, "Thank God He welcomes sinners, or I would never have a chance to know Him!" Their criticism was actually a compliment! As the old hymn says, "Sing it o'er and o'er again, Christ receiveth sinful men!" If you are here today and you feel you aren't good enough, that you have failed and blown it too many times to approach God, let me remind you that Jesus welcomes sinners! Because Jesus welcomed sinners, as the Body of Christ, we need to welcome sinners, too! Look at verse 3:

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 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. Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

What is it that makes heaven happy? In all three of these parables, Jesus reports there is great rejoicing in heaven when one person turns from their sins and puts their faith in Jesus Christ. The world may be impressed when we build a huge building, but I don't believe heaven celebrates too much when a building is built. The world may be impressed with our multitude of programs and ministries, but Jesus never said there was joy in the presence of angels over 4,000 people gathering for Bible Study. He did say, not once, not twice, but three times there is great joy in heaven when *one* person turns to God and receives His forgiveness.

There's a gospel song entitled, “That's when the angels rejoice” written by Larry Bryant:

When the Model T first hit the street,  
It didn't bring all heaven to its feet.  
And when the first computer was born,  
They didn't blow Old Gabriel's horn.  
There's only one thing that we're sure about  
That can make those angels jump and shout:  
It's when a sinner makes the Lord his choice;  
That's when the angels rejoice.

Now heaven doesn't strike up a band  
For any old occasion at hand;  
It's got to be a special thing,  
To make those angels smile and sing.  
Now when the United States became a nation,  
There was no angelic celebration.  
But when one lost sinner comes back home,  
They jump for joy around the throne!

Let's examine these two parables and discover why heaven gets so happy when a person turns to Christ. First, consider what Jesus said about

## **I. THE LOST LAMB: GOD LOVES YOU AS AN INDIVIDUAL**

In all three of these parables, there was something lost that was found. In the first parable, a little lamb is lost and the Shepherd leaves the others to go out and find the individual lamb. It's obvious we are like the lost lamb and Jesus is the Shepherd. We are one who is lost. That's leads to this observation:

### **1. The saddest experience of life is to be lost**

In the parable, God is the Shepherd, and the lost lamb represents us. In Isaiah 53:6, the Bible says, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.” I shared with you a couple of months ago there are three words starting with “D” that describe sheep: They are dumb, defenseless, and directionless. You won't see any trained sheep acts at the circus—they are too dumb. Almost all animals have either claws, sharp teeth, quills, a hard shell, or speed to escape predators—but not a lamb—they

have no defenses. Sheep get lost easily, too. There are homing pigeons, and cats and dogs can often find their way back home, but sheep are clueless about how to find their own way back home. In many respects, we are the same way in our ability to rescue ourselves from our lost condition. We are dumb, defenseless, and directionless. Like sheep, we all have a tendency to stray away from God. The hymn says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."

It can be unnerving to be lost. Years ago when I was in college, I was driving through Atlanta, Georgia late one night. There was a lot of construction on the highways, and somehow I got lost. I spent about two hours wandering through dark neighborhoods trying to find my way toward a highway. How many of you have ever been in a strange building or city and gotten lost? It can be a distressing experience, but you were only lost temporarily, because you are here today! In this passage Jesus uses the word "lost" to speak of the spiritual condition of being eternally lost. The word L-O-S-T is one of the scariest four lettered words in the human language.

A lost soul is the most tragic condition in life. I once knew a man in Alabama who at one time was very wealthy, but because of some unwise investments, he lost it all. It's terrible to lose a fortune, but that's nothing compared to the tragedy of a lost soul.

I sat at the bedside of a young man ravaged by Hodgkin's Disease. A few months earlier he had been strong and healthy, but he had become a shell of a man. It's terrible when someone loses his health, but not nearly as terrible as a lost soul.

You can lose your mind, and it's not as tragic as a lost soul. You can lose your character, and it's not as bad as a losing your soul. Death will heal the loss of a fortune, or a loss of health or a loss of a mind—but a lost soul is for eternity. We are all like a lost lamb at one time in our lives. Jesus can never find you until you admit you are a lost sinner. That's the bad news, without Christ we are *lost*. But the good news is:

## **2. Jesus searches for us in order to save us**

The shepherd had 100 sheep. Just before he was ready to bed them down, he began to count them, "...95, 96, 97, 98, 99...Whoa, I'm missing one! Hey, where's Snowflake? I haven't seen her all afternoon." Then the Shepherd does something surprising, he *leaves* the other 99 sheep and sets off to find the single lost lamb. Remember, that's what God is like. Have you ever heard the statement, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one?" I think Mr. Spock said that in one of the Star Trek movies, but for sure, Jesus never said anything like that. God is more concerned with the individual than with the group. God deals with us as individuals—not as groups. He cannot save this crowd, but He will save every individual in this crowd who will accept His love and forgiveness. You don't get saved by hanging around other saved people—that's called salvation by association—it doesn't work that way. You have to have a personal encounter with the Shepherd yourself.

Now, many folks think the shepherd is foolish to leave the 99 sheep in order to search for one lamb. After all, you have to factor in some attrition, or depreciation, what's the big deal if one is lost? You still have the 99—it's only a 1% loss! But with God, every individual matters.

If the shepherd had 10,000 sheep and one was lost, I believe he would have left the 9,999 and gone after the one. Why? Because it is the character of our God to love the individual and to seek the lost. If you were the only person on earth who was lost and needed a Savior, I think Jesus would have still come to earth and died on a cross for your sins. That’s why Jesus came to earth.

The bad news is without God you are LOST, LOST, LOST. But the good news is Jesus loves you so much He died on the CROSS, the CROSS, the CROSS! In Luke 19:10 Jesus said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” It is the nature of God to seek the lost. In the other religions of the world, man is seeking and searching for God, but in the Christian faith it is the God of the Universe who comes seeking and searching for you!

Notice what happened when the shepherd found the lost lamb. He didn’t scold the lamb or take a whip and drive the lamb back to the flock. Instead, the shepherd picked up the lamb and carried him on his shoulder all the way back home. To me, that communicates salvation is something Jesus does for us—not something we do for Him. He does it all. He carries us home. Won’t you let the shepherd pick you up today and carry you home? Now, let’s look at the second parable:

## **II. THE LOST COIN: GOD HAS GONE TO EXTREME MEASURES TO RESCUE YOU**

In this second parable, it’s not a lamb that has wandered off on its own; it’s a coin that has been accidentally lost. The woman had ten coins and one of them was lost. The word Jesus used was for a coin that didn’t have much monetary value at the time. However, most scholars believe this coin was part of a headdress brides wore. Jewish brides often wore a headdress of ten coins strung across their foreheads. So the coin had great sentimental value because it was part of her wedding vows. That’s why she literally turned her house upside down to find it.

Have you ever lost something? A few years ago, Cindy and I planned a trip to Europe. We planned and saved for this trip for months. The night before we were to leave, I started looking for Cindy’s passport, and couldn’t find it anywhere. First, I started looking casually, then I started searching seriously, then finally we both started looking frantically. We opened every drawer, and looked in every spot imaginable—still no passport. We were certain it was hopelessly lost, so after hours of searching, we came up with Plan B. This was back when Continental Express still flew into Tyler, so our plan was for Cindy to fly to Houston early the next morning, walk her passport application through the Passport Center, pay the extra money to expedite the application, and then fly to DFW to meet me for our departure to Europe. If she was delayed in her application or if her flights were delayed, she wouldn’t make it in time and we would have to take another flight to Europe. This lost passport was going to cost a lot of money and hassle. Just as she was getting ready to leave to fill out her passport application, she looked in the side of one of her purses, and voila! There was her passport. She had gone on a mission trip to Canada a few weeks earlier and that was the purse she took. I tell you, there was joy in presence of David over the lost passport that was found!

In this parable, the woman is so intent on finding the lost coin she does two important things: First, she lights a lamp and second she sweeps up the dirt on her floor. In our lost condition, we

are represented by the lost coin and Jesus is the one searching to find us. There is an important application we can make from these two details of light and sweeping.

### **1. Jesus lives to give you light**

The first thing the woman did was light a lamp to help her see clearly. Most of you have heard the old joke about the man looking for some lost money under the street light at night. A policeman started helping him look. After a few moments the policeman asked the man, "Exactly where did you lose the money?" The man replied, "Oh I lost it half way down the block." The policeman said, "Then why are you searching here?" The man said, "Because the light is so much better!" It does help to have light when you are looking for something. Before Jesus finds us we are lost in the darkness of sin. Jesus came into this world to provide the light of truth. In John 8:12 Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

In the Bible there is a connection between light and truth. God gives every person a measure of light, or truth about Himself—even if they don't have a Bible. They can look at creation and understand Someone superior and intelligent designed it all. They can look within and understand that every person is born with a sense of right and wrong—and understand there must be a moral absolute in the Universe. Everybody has *some* light. If you walk toward the light, God gives you more and more light about Jesus. If you walk away from the light, the Bible says in Romans 1 that your understanding becomes darkened. In addition to being light,

### **2. Jesus died to sweep out your dirt**

The lost coin was somewhere on the floor, and the best way to find it was to take a broom and sweep up all the dirt. In the process of cleaning every square inch of the floor, the woman found the coin. There's a great lesson here as well. In addition to giving you light, Jesus desires to cleanse your life of all the dirt and filth accumulated there. He died on the cross so your sins could be forgiven. We read in 1 John 1:7, "And the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

I believe the old hymn that says, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." I don't understand *how* the blood of Jesus can cleanse a sinful heart any more than I can understand *how* a brown cow can eat green grass and give white milk! I just know the Bible says there is cleansing power in the blood of Jesus. Before you can be found, you need the light of the Lord and the cleansing power of the Lord.

In all three of these parables, the single theme that emerges is

## **III. THE JOY OF SALVATION: HEAVEN REJOICES OVER EVERY CHANGED LIFE**

The jubilant shepherds called his friends and they rejoiced over the little lamb that was lost and is now found. The woman was so overjoyed when she recovered her lost coin she plans a party

to celebrate it. Even so, Jesus said there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents.

In his book, *Just Like Jesus*, Max Lucado wrote: "Let one child consent to be dressed in righteousness and begin the journey home and heaven pours the punch, strings the streamers, and throws the confetti...when a soul is saved, the heart of Jesus becomes the night sky on the Fourth of July, radiant with explosions of cheer." (*Just Like Jesus*, by Max Lucado, p. 143)

Let me share with you WHY heaven rejoices over a single person who repents.

## **1. The happiest experience of life is to be rescued by God**

Remember, the saddest experience of life is to be spiritually lost—but to be found and rescued by God is the most joyous experience. I believe we should be more excited about our own salvation. You cannot lose your salvation, but sadly, many people have lost the *joy* of their salvation. We read in 1 Peter 1:8-9, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Do you have a sense of this inexpressible and glorious joy? When Jesus is in your heart, there will be this sense of joy. In London, you can always tell if the Queen is in residence at Buckingham Palace because a certain flag flies over the palace whenever she is there. Even so, *joy* is the flag flying over the castle of our hearts announcing that the King is in residence there today.

In John 15:11 Jesus said, "I have spoken these things unto you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy should be complete." It's more than just a Vacation Bible School song, but if you have Jesus in your heart then you should be able to sing, "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart!" If you have Jesus' joy in your heart, you should notify your face!

## **2. We should celebrate what heaven celebrates!**

What is it in life that really gets you excited? What would give you the greatest joy that you could imagine? What would it take for you to grin and jump around and dance a jig and shout, "Yee hah!?" I wonder if anything could move some of you to that kind of joy. Some of you are so straight-laced, a stick of dynamite couldn't move you! But what would it take to really get your fired up? For some it would be winning the lottery, or getting a hole-in-one, or hearing the doctor say the words, "cancer free." It might be different for different people. But for those of us who claim to love Jesus, I submit to you we should celebrate what heaven celebrates. Because there is joy in the presence of angels when one sinner repents, there should be joy among believers when a person repents.

I know when a person is baptized, that is not the moment of their repentance and salvation, but it is their public profession of their faith—so I think we ought to get excited and celebrate whenever someone professes their faith through baptism. I don't think we get excited enough, frankly. I remember the time Sasha Vukaya was baptized and I asked her, "Tell us who is your Lord?" She

lifted her hands and shouted, “Jesus Christ is my Lord!” Whoop! When she did that, people here started whooping and hollering and clapping—that probably came the closest I can ever remember to imitating the scene that happens in heaven when a person repents.

We get so excited about other things in life—a win for our team, a promotion at work, graduation from school—I think our greatest celebration should be reserved for the time when someone comes into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus is teaching us that God is like a shepherd who goes searching for one little lost lamb, and when He finds him, God celebrates! God is like the woman who turns her house upside down to find the one lost coin—and when God finds that lost person, there is a party. In the next parable, we are going to see God is like a loving Father who grieves when a son walks away, but when the son returns, there is celebration. Look ahead to the last verse in chapter 15 to see why God celebrates. In verse 32 the father of the prodigal son says, “But we HAD to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Our God is personally interested in every lost lamb, every lost coin, and every wayward son. He is interested in the secretary in your office, the student in the classroom, the executive in the boardroom, and the drunkard on the street. He wants every lost person to be found.

## CONCLUSION

You will never fully celebrate your salvation or the salvation of anyone else until you understand how wretched and miserable it is to be totally lost without Christ. Years ago there was an Englishman named John who was a slave trader. He owned and operated a ship that sailed to Africa to collect a human cargo of African people to be bought and sold as slaves back in England. He was a wicked man with a cruel, evil personality. He oversaw the death of many slaves with never a second thought—those who knew him considered him to be beyond hope of redemption. Someone gave him a book entitled *The Imitation of Christ*, but he refused to read it. Not long afterwards, he was caught in a terrible storm at sea and his ship was sinking. Desperate for deliverance, He cried out to God. He said, “God have mercy on us!” The ship and crew survived the storm—and John was a changed man. He started reading *The Imitation of Christ* and the Bible. God had been searching for the wicked slave trader and on March 10, 1748 God *found* him and rescued him from a life of sin. He sold his ship and gave up the slave trade. He became involved in the anti-slavery movement in England and in year of his death, 1807, the English Parliament abolished slavery in the British Empire. Here was a wicked, depraved slave trader who was radically changed by Jesus Christ. What did John have to say about his salvation? Everyone in this room has read his words many times. His name was John Newton and he wrote these words: “Amazing grace how sweet the sound; that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost; but now I’m found; was blind, but now I see!”

Have you ever admitted you were a “wretch” before Jesus found you? Do you realize how miserable and depraved you were before you repented and accepted God’s love? You’ll never truly celebrate and appreciate God’s grace until you realize how terrible it is to be lost.

If you are lost today, you can be found. God is seeking and searching for you. He loves you so much that Jesus came and died on the cross for your sins. Will you repent? To repent simply means to change your mind and to change your behavior. Change your mind about Jesus and Who He is and what He can do for you. Accept His grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Change your behavior and start living as He wants you to live. When you turn to Him, there is joy in the presence of angels!

## OUTLINE

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1. The saddest experience of life is to be lost

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all." *Isaiah 53:6*

2. Jesus searches for us in order to save us

Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." *Luke 19:10*

### II. THE LOST COIN: GOD HAS GONE TO EXTREME MEASURES TO RESCUE YOU

1. Jesus lives to give you light

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." *John 8:12*

2. Jesus died to sweep out your dirt

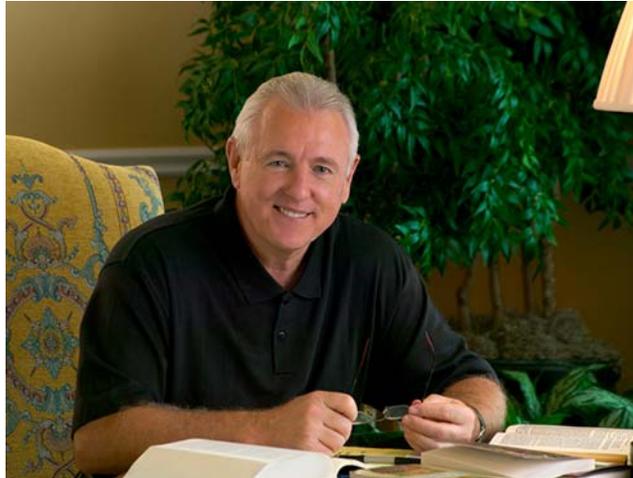
"And the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." *1 John 1:7*

### III. THE JOY OF SALVATION: HEAVEN REJOICES OVER EVERY CHANGED LIFE

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"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." *1 Peter 1:8-9*

2. We should celebrate what heaven celebrates!



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes