

Lostness

Tonight I want to use our time to discuss “lostness.”

SIN is not so much what we do, but what we are:

“A great many of us need to revise our notions of what it is to be lost. The common conception seems to be that to be in hell is to be lost. The true view is that to be in sin is to be lost. Sin is worse than hell and makes it what it is. Hell would not be the awful place it is if it were not for the sin that is there. And so Jesus came, not to save people from a place called hell, but from a state of being and character, and a course of conduct called sin. ‘He shall save His people from their sins.’ (Matthew 1:21) It is sin that has cut the cable between God and man, and thus shuts man off from that current of divinity in which alone is life, holiness and peace; and left him to death, misery and ruin.”

{ Author unknown }

The Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:10-14

¹⁰ "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹² What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. **ESV**

Luke 15:1-7

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that 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 his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Verse 1. Jesus never approved of sin. But He did not despise the wretched and they were attracted to Him. His purity was a protest against their wickedness, yet His message of salvation awakened hope within them.

Verse 2. By contrast the Pharisees and scribes, who themselves had rejected Jesus were exasperated by His tenderness to the very outcasts they despised. They meant vs. 2 as an insult yet it truly was to the glory of God.

Jesus reproved their exclusiveness and to show how completely out of sympathy they were with the inhabitants of heaven He gives three parables.

Luke 15 links the parable of the **lost** sheep {1-7} with the **lost** coin {8-10} and the **lost** son {11-32} in a progression to show the rejoicing in heaven in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents.

The Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10

⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-32

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. **12** And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. **13** Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. **14** And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs 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 more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" **20** And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. **21** And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' **22** But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. **23** And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. **24** For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

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** And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' **28** But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, **29** but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' **31** And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. **32** It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Three parables with one purpose:

The Lost Sheep; the Lost Coin; the Lost Son

Heaven is not a place for “good” people. Only bad people need a Savior.

These three parables show how unlike God the Pharisees were in the spirit they manifested when they taunted Jesus with the reception of sinners, and they each illustrate the joy in heaven over a penitent’s return to God.

The first two show what the scribes and Pharisees ought to have felt by describing the joy of the shepherd over the recovery of a lost sheep, and the joy of the woman at finding a piece of money which she had lost. The third teaches the same lesson by portraying the happiness of the father receiving to his home again the son whom he had lost. And in the episode of the elder brother there is a mirror for each Pharisee to see himself.

The three parables are different views of every sinner and not three classes of sinners.

They show the condition and redemption from God’s side and the sinner’s side.

They show different times in the course of a sinner coming to God. When the prodigal **comes to himself** and says, “I will arise and go to my father.”

The parable of the lost sheep tells us that the Good Shepherd was **already seeking**.

The lost coin informs us that the “woman” had **already been there** with her lighted candle and her dislodging broom to seek the piece that was lost.

The lost sheep:

The argument implied is this. If the recovery of one sheep is recognized by you as an event so joyous as to warrant the owner of it to call his friends and neighbors together to rejoice with him because he had found it, much more is the recovery of a lost soul by God a cause for gladness to Him and all beside Him; and if you do not participate in that delight, then you are out of harmony with the inhabitants of heaven, among whom “there is joy over one sinner that repents.”

It is an argument from the less to the greater built upon the premise put with “How much is a man better than a sheep?” Thus there is the contrast of the cynicism of the scribes and Pharisees over His reception of publicans and sinners.

That is the main lesson; yet there is more.

The loss. The sinner is lost and is compared to the helplessness of the sheep. But the loss is the Shepherd’s loss! Infinite pathos! We do not ascribe human emotions to God because He is content within Himself and cannot “lose” anything. Yet we cannot escape the message of these three parables. They show that in the separation between God and man, which sin caused, Jehovah has lost something that He formerly possessed, and highly valued. It shows somewhat the value of the great Sacrifice that He made for man’s redemption {John 3:16}.

Search and discovery. Who are the ninety-nine that are left? They need no repentance. There is a suggestion that it refers to the Pharisees, e.g., “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Matthew 9:12

But verse 7 indicates some joy over the 99 and since they need no repentance they have never sinned. The 99 could be the holy angels who kept their first estate.

The representation is the Son of God leaving heaven to seek the lost in His incarnation.

When the sinner finds God it is like two sides of the same coin. God has first sought the sinner. He does not strike the sheep or speak harshly to it. But gently puts it on His shoulders and rejoices. “A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.” Isaiah 42:3

The joy in verse 7. The final introduction of the saved into glory, not that there is not joy at the time the sinner is found {saved}.

There is more joy over the redemption of sinners than the keeping of angels.

More on the Lost Coin

Houses in these times were not well lighted as we are accustomed to. A coin is easily lost on the floor.

What was the value of these coins to the woman?

Part of her dowry, perhaps?

Women wore coins in their hair.

She would pass them down to her daughter.

All would be interested in the recovery of her lost coin.

Friends would be called.

The Greek word is feminine, so the “friends” would be her women friends who would understand her delight.

The parable repeats the theme of the lost sheep: a loss, a recovery, joy.

Again, Christ is answering the Pharisees [15:2].

If a woman rejoices over a lost coin that is found, how much more does a right-thinking person rejoice with God over a lost sinner that is recovered?

Again, Jesus continues to show how wrong the Pharisees were in despising Him for receiving and eating with sinners [15:2].

The first two parables show the seeking of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

More on the Lost Son:

The prodigal [wasteful son] shows the sinner “coming to himself” and returning voluntarily. The sheep and the coin shows the divine side and the prodigal shows the human side.

There are not three ways to be saved, but several ways of looking at the same thing.

The man comes, yet Christ brings him. Christ brings him, yet he comes.

Here we see the sinner’s deliberate estrangement from God and how low and wretched he becomes. “The way of the transgressors is hard.”

The son cannot wait for his father to die and he can’t wait to escape his father’s authority. He had already ceased to be his son in his heart.

Any young person who thinks his or her home life is unbearable should know that they will never have another father and mother.

The father’s reception of the son:

Nothing has changed at home, but oh what a change in the son!

The love of God is seen in one out of one hundred sheep; one out of ten coins; one out of two sons.

The attitude of the Pharisees is shown in the elder brother. He was not in the least pleased that his brother had repented and returned.

The elder brother:

Refuses to acknowledge him as his brother; “this son of yours”.

All the years he had been in his father’s house and yet he did not share his father’s love.

The servant showed more “sonship”.

The father ignores the elder brother’s attitude.

The elder brother is no poorer for the wastefulness of his brother.

All the father had left [half of what he had before] was his.

The elder brother was not mistreated because his father rejoiced of the lost son.

Again referring to 15:2, if the Pharisees are meant to be represented by the elder brother, there is a problem. The father says to the elder brother, “Son, you are always with me.”

Calvin: “He compares the scribes, who were swelled with presumption, to good and modest men, who had always lived with decency and sobriety, and had honorably supported their families – nay, even to obedient children, who, throughout their whole lives, had patiently submitted to their father’s control. And though they were utterly unworthy of this commendation, yet Christ, speaking according to their belief, attributes to them, by way of concession, their pretended holiness, as if it had been virtue; as if He had said, “Though I were to grant you what you falsely boast of, that you have always been obedient children to God, still you ought not so haughtily and cruelly reject your brethren when they repent of their wicked life.”

The elder brother, whether or not he is representative of the scribes and Pharisees, is the picture of envy; and wherever, or in whomsoever, at any time, or in any degree, that quality manifests itself, there you have, for the time being, the elder brother.

The entire chapter shows that there is no obstacle to the salvation of a sinner, on God’s side. If any obstacle remains, it is entirely with the sinner himself.

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