

Lost & Found

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if you've ever got somebody badly wrong. My favourite example of this is a famous story from 1962, told of a man who travelled to London with his guitar and his three friends to perform one of their first ever music auditions in front of a record producer.

So they perform in front of this record producer. They finish and then they ask him what he thought about them. And he replied, sorry mate, we don't like your sound.

Boy bands are on the way out. As it turns out, the record producer had just turned down Paul McCartney and the Beatles. Getting somebody badly, badly wrong.

Well, as we turn to Luke chapter 15 this morning, I encourage you to have that passage open in front of you. As we turn to Luke chapter 15 this morning, and to think, no exaggeration to say one of the world's most loved stories, we need to understand that Jesus is talking to a crowd.

And in this crowd are people who have got God badly wrong. Luke who's listening to Jesus at verses 1 and 2. Luke tells us, do you see, that there are two groups in this crowd.

[1 : 18] First group, tax collectors and sinners. As we've seen in the play, you don't get much more hated. I'm a much more hated group of people in this culture than tax collectors.

Because they are Jews who work for the Romans by collecting taxes for the Romans from their fellow Jews. I mean, these guys are like the opposite of Robin Hood. They steal from the poor and they take that money and they give it to the rich.

And so in this culture, they're regarded as total scum. Probably told that every day, that God wants absolutely nothing to do with you.

Little wonder then that as they hear Jesus talk about God's great banquet. Remember we saw that in Luke chapter 14? God's great banquet where outsiders are welcomed in.

No wonder that they are drawing near to Jesus. Because they have never seen or heard or met anyone quite like him in their whole life.

[2 : 21] Pharisees and the scribes of the other group. What are they doing in this story? They're grumbling. Do you see how Luke tells us that? Why? Well, because they are watching Jesus as an action.

And they are aghast at what he's doing. He associates with them. He associates with them. He eats with them.

And it's not like Jesus and the tax collectors and sinners have just accidentally turned up at the same restaurant. It's not like they've gone to Nando's and they just happen to share a booth. Jesus is going towards these despicable outsiders.

That is a red rag to a bull to these Pharisees. Because in their minds, Jesus should be at their parties, wining and dining with them, and proposing a toast, raising a glass to their righteousness. They want him to say about them. When the God said in the beginning, when we were thinking about the epitome of man, we could not have imagined it could have got any better than this to the Pharisees.

[3 : 26] That's what they want them to say. You see these two groups in this story? Two groups in this crowd? Both of them asking, why?

Why Jesus? One group asking, why would Jesus bother with me? And the other group asking, why would Jesus bother with them?

I wonder if that's you here this morning. If that's the, right, I've got a thing for symmetry, okay, I'm just moving this to the middle. I wonder if that's you this morning. Are you asking, why would Jesus bother with me?

Why would Jesus bother with me? Because if he knew what I'd done, if he knew what I'm doing, then he would run a mile from me. But the thing about being God, the one who created you, is that

he knows you.

He knows all things about you. It's kind of how being God works. He knows all things. And here are two groups of people in their minds asking why.

[4 : 29] Well, to help this crowd understand the why, verse 3, do you see Jesus told them this parable? Featuring firstly verses 3 to 7, a determined shepherd. See how many sheep he's got?

100 sheep. What happens? One wanders off. Now we might look at that and say, a 1% loss? I think I take those odds. 1% loss?

Are you kidding me? But we have to understand that in this culture, this is a big deal. A big deal. Most likely this flock of 100 sheep would have been made up of the shepherd sheep, his wider family sheep, and maybe even some of their neighbor sheep as well.

And the shepherd has got collective responsibility to look after this whole flock. And so when Jesus asked his listeners, would the shepherd not leave the 99 and would he not go and hunt for the one? They are not thinking, no chance. They are thinking, of course he would. Of course he would. But the question is, what is this shepherd in this story?

[5 : 30] What's he going to do? You know, our little girl Chloe, she was singing, in the bath the other night, she was singing Little Bo Peep. Do you know that song? Little Bo Peep.

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and doesn't know where to find them. And I'm listening to her singing this song and I'm thinking, that's interesting because I've been studying a shepherd this week who has also lost some sheep.

I wonder how Little Bo Peep plans on finding her sheep. And she goes on, leave them alone and they will come home wagging their tails behind them.

And I'm thinking to myself, I don't want to burst her bubble, I don't have the heart, but I'm thinking to myself, Little Bo Peep, you've been getting away with this for years. So I'm going to out her as a terrible shepherdess this morning because couched in the middle of a sweet lullaby is some quite shocking shepherding.

Her plan on getting her lost sheep to come back is to leave them alone and trust that they will find their own way back. It's terrible shepherding.

[6 : 45] That would never happen. That's why that's terrible shepherding. And the shepherd that Jesus talks about here, he knows that all too well. See how Jesus describes the plan of this shepherd at verse four.

Look at it there. What does he do? He goes after the lost sheep and he finds the lost sheep and you see the joy that it brings him that he's found his lost sheep.

See the effort that he goes to to find the sheep and then get it back. What does he do? He puts it on his shoulders and he walks all the way home with it on his shoulders.

And when he gets home, he doesn't just collapse in the armchair. What does he do? He throws a massive party to celebrate all his friends and neighbours. Come and rejoice because this lost sheep of mine, I found it.

Now that is what I call a shepherd. That is what I call a shepherd. And as we'll see in a little bit's time, we've got to praise God that this is the shepherd that he describes here.

[7 : 54] Is that just a nice story? No, it's a wonderful picture, says Jesus, of God's heart for the lost and the party that kicks off in heaven every time a lost sinner repents and calls out to God and comes home to the Father.

Do you see how you have got God badly wrong, says Jesus? So if to underscore the point, secondly, verses 8 to 10, he says, picture a diligent woman in your minds, picture a diligent woman. She's got 10 coins. And the Greek word for coin there, drachma, one drachma is the equivalent of one day's wage in this culture. So this woman has lost one day's wage.

That is a significant amount of money to her and it's little surprise that she wants to get it back. And look at the lengths that she goes to again to find it. Verse 8, what does she do?

She lights the lamp, she sweeps the house, she searches carefully. And again, do you see the joy that finding that lost coin brings to her?

[9 : 00] She calls all her friends and her neighbors together, come and celebrate with me because I found my lost coin. Is that a nice story? No.

It's a wonderful truth, a wonderful picture, says Jesus, of God's heart for the lost and the party that kicks off in heaven every time a lost sinner puts their hand up and says, God, I'm sorry and comes back home to God the Father.

Do you see how you've got God wrong, says Jesus? Do you see how he's, Jesus being the master storyteller that he is? Do you see how he's just building the suspense here?

He's intensifying the drama and we've moved from a, what did we start with? A 1% loss. Now we've moved to a 10% loss. Well, at verses 11 to 31, Jesus continues and he speaks about a desperate father.

A desperate father who's not suffered a 1% loss, who's not suffered a 10% loss, but who's suffered a 50% loss. And a 50% loss, not of his possessions, but of something far, far more precious to him. [10:08] He's lost 50% of his sons. Remember Jesus, he's still trying to get these folks in the crowd to understand the why of what he's doing.

He tells them a story. A story that centers around a family home and it centers around a father. And the big question we have to ask as we meet this father here in Luke chapter 15 is what is this father like?

What is he like? And as we meet the father's two sons, the question we need to ask is, what do they think their father is like? Have they got him right?

Or have they got him wrong? Verse 12, we're introduced to the younger of the sons. You see him, son number two. Well, what's he like? Well, we get to know him a little bit. He loves the thought of the high life.

He wants the clothes. He wants the parties. He wants the cars. But what he lacks is both the money to make it happen and the freedom to live it out.

[11:13] So what does he do? He goes to his father and he doesn't say, Father, would you give me just a little bit of pocket money? Because if I could save up over a number of months and a number of years and just put it away, then maybe I could afford to do some of the things I want to do.

He doesn't say that, does he? He goes to his father and he says effectively, Dad, I'd much prefer if you were dead. Because when you die, I can get the stuff that's going to come to me.

So I would really like it if somehow we could speed up that process. I'd love it if we could speed up that process. In other words, Dad, I don't want you.

I don't want you. I just want your stuff. I just want your stuff. Now who does he understand his father to be? He understands his father to be just a means to an end.

He thinks that true joy is not to be found, certainly not to be found at home with his father. He thinks that true joy and true satisfaction is to be found in living his life as far away from home as he can possibly get.

[12:21] C.S. Lewis in his book, *Surprised by Joy*, which is really just his autobiography, testimony of how he became a Christian, he talks about how before he became a Christian, he viewed the God at the heart of the Christian faith as nothing other than a giant interferer.

I read that, I remember reading that book a few years ago and thinking, that's kind of how I used to think of God. He was kind of like the football referee. I used to hate football referees when I was growing up.

Do you know why? Because I thought, your job, and you're getting paid for this, your job is just to spoil my fun, to tell me I'm doing wrong, to stop me from doing certain things, and to probably stop me from winning the game.

That's how I viewed God. He was just a killjoy. Certainly no joy to be found in knowing him. So C.S. Lewis is saying, God is a giant interferer.

And she's son number two, he's got his father all wrong. But his father, amazingly, he divides his property. You see, for the father, this is more than simply writing out a blank check to his son.

[13:34] The father here is literally said to have divided himself over this request from his son. Do you see what he's saying? Jesus is saying the father is, he's been ripped apart by this.

He's heartbroken by what his younger son wants to do. But God, the father in the story, gives him up. And the son takes his father's money in verse 13.

Do you see that he goes in the gap year of all gap years? He lives this life that he once wanted to live, but eventually that money runs out. Eventually the champagne stops flowing.

Eventually these new friends that he made have disappeared. And to survive, what does he do?

Well, he, a Jewish boy, he melts himself a slave, which is bad enough.

But to a Gentile pig farmer, that is incredibly shameful. And to feed the pigs total humiliation for son number two, he has hit rock bottom.

[14:43] Total rock bottom. And as he's there in rock bottom, he remembers what life was like at home. And he thinks, I've got to get home.

Got to get home. And he makes his way home and you can imagine him, can't you? Cap in hand. He's no doubt thinking through what's going to happen when he gets home. The fact that he returns a failure, he does not return a success.

He cannot go up to his father and say, Father, I've got a master's degree now. I've got 2.4 children. I've got a Ferrari. I'm a success. Get me on the wall. He returns to his father with an empty stomach, with stinking clothes and with a bruised ego.

And here's the tension in the drama at this point. See, when he gets home and his father learns that he's blowing it big time, I mean, that inheritance money that the father gave him, gone just like that. What's the father going to do? As the reader, we know what son number 2 deserves. The people in the crowd listening to the story, they know what son number 2 deserves.

[15:49] Hey, even son number 2 knows what son number 2 deserves. The question is, will the father give him what he deserves? And we cannot stress enough the sense of shock that the original hearers would have had at what comes next.

Verse 20, do you see it? The camera pans from looking at son number 2 to now looking at the father. And I just want you to see two words that Jesus uses to describe the father here.

First word at verse 20, what does the father feel? Compassion. The father is desperate to see his lost son come home.

His father is looking for his lost son. His father is longing for his lost son. And so then it's little wonder that as he sees him in the distance, he runs to meet him and he greets him.

Not with a handshake, not with a nod of appreciation, not with a fist pump. He's not from the west coast of Scotland. But he embraces him and he kisses him and he hugs him.

[17:01] Which you have to say is horrendously strange behaviour for a Jewish man. I mean, they didn't run anywhere. In fact, it's more than strange the father here, and we need to see this, the father here is humiliating himself.

His father is stooping so low. His father is taking the spotlight of shame off of his son, taking it instead upon himself out of his great love for his lost child.

What a father. And what does that lead to? Second words for us to see at verse 23. What does the father do? He celebrates. The father is joyous.

The father is lavish. Look at the description at verse 22. Give him the best robe. Give him a ring. Give him sandals. Kill the fattened calf.

The son who came to the father thinking that he was going to negotiate terms and start off again low is blown away by the grace of the father. What is the father like?

[18:08] He is a longing looker, says Jesus. He is a loving seeker. He is one who rejoices when lost people who have no way of finding themselves are found. This is what the father is like.

Just a nice story? No. It's a wonderful picture, says Jesus. A wonderful picture of God's heart for the lost and the description of the party that kicks off in heaven every time a lost sinner repents, puts their hand up and says, God, I am lost.

I'm sorry for what I've done and comes home to God the father. Do you see how you've got God wrong, says Jesus? Do you see how you've got him wrong?

Let me ask you, are you sitting here this morning as we see the father here? Have you got God wrong? You're like son number one.

Do you believe that true joy, that true satisfaction in life is to be found away from him rather than with him? You see, the question to this crowd and to us this morning is how will the younger brothers in the crowd respond as they see themselves in his character and as they see the character of the father?

[19:33] So what about son number one? What about the older son? Well, from the field, verse 25, son number one hears the party that's going on inside and he finds out that the arrogant traveler, he finds out that his brother has somehow had the audacity to turn up at home.

But here's the square that he can't quite circle in his mind. If my brother has returned a failure, then why are we celebrating?

Why are we celebrating? What is he described as being at verse 28? Do you see it? He is angry. He's not just indifferent, he's raging at his brother.

You see, he wants a front row seat at his brother's public humiliation party. He's not interested in taking a front row seat at his brother's welcome home celebration party. He is angry.

And so the father goes to son number two, the older son, and he pleads with him, my son, you should be in here celebrating with me. You should be in here sharing my joy with my guests. Come on in and celebrate because your son, my son, your brother is back.

[20 : 42] Not a chance, says the older brother. Not a chance I'm going in there. Who does son number one understand the father to be? We'll see how he describes his relationship to him at verse 29. All these years, I've been what for you?

I've been slaving for you. Slaving for you. Who does son number one understand his father to be? Someone to be tolerated? Someone to just obey?

Someone to keep up appearances with? Certainly not somebody to be enjoyed. Because I perform for you, father. Because I obey you, father. Because I am better than others, father. Surely that means that I deserve to be treated better than those who don't perform and don't obey for you.

You see how son number two had the father wrong? Do you see how son number one has equally got the father just as wrong? What's son number two's problem? Son number one's problem rather. He's got a hard heart. He's got a hard heart. Geographically speaking, he's right up close to the father. He's in the house. Proximity speaking, he's right there. But spiritually speaking, his heart is a million miles away from understanding the truth about who his father is.

[21 : 53] You know, I wonder if that's some of us here this morning. Your relationship with God, if you had to describe it, you would describe it in slave terms rather than son terms. This is the older brother here.

You know, we might have been at church all these years. We might have been living our lives in and around Christian family and Christian friends and Christian circles all these years. But the truth of it is, if you scratch beneath the surface, if you look deep down, you don't really know who God is. Certainly some who are in this crowd that Jesus is talking to this morning, talking to here rather, sorry, have you got God wrong? It's interesting how as we come to the end of this story that we're not told how son number one responds.

I mean, does he stay outside or does he go in? That's a deliberate cliffhanger from Jesus aimed at the older brothers in the crowd because how will they respond as they see themselves in his character?

And how will they respond as they see the character of the father? Now, if Jesus has shown them that they are getting God wrong, then surely the question as we come to the end of this parable is now, will you get God right?

[23 : 08] How are they going to do that? By understanding that this is what Jesus is all about. He is the one who has humiliated himself by leaving his father's house, by taking on our flesh to go in search of those who are lost.

He is the one who is on the way to the cross. Remember where this comes in Luke's gospel? To go to the cross, the place where he will stoop so low offering his life on the cross, taking the sin of running rebels like you and me on himself so that we can be made right with God and we can come into the father's house.

Will the people in the crowd get God right? How are they going to do that? By getting Jesus right. And that's the challenge for us this morning as we work towards a close.

Have we got God right? have we got God right? Two thoughts as we finish. First thought to make us praise. I was left marvelling this week as I've been studying this passage and what a joy it's been in just how much God has done for me.

Just how much God has done for me. The lengths that he has gone to to buy me for himself. Do you see yourself in Luke 15?

[24 : 38] I was that lost sheep. I was that lost coin. I was that lost son. I had no chance of finding myself.

No chance of saving myself. No chance of rescuing myself. But praise God this morning that he is not like an apathetic shepherd. Praise God this morning that he is not like an unconcerned woman. And praise God this morning that he is not like a cold father. No. What were we singing earlier?

What's the truth? That Jesus sought me when a stranger.

When I was wandering far from the fold of God. He, to rescue me from danger. He shed for me his precious blood.

Does that thrill your heart this morning? Because that is right at the heart of the gospel, is it not? This is what our God has done for us. Does that thrill your heart?

[25 : 42] That you are that valuable to God? That as his once lost creature, he made a way for you to be found? That's the heart of the gospel. First thing to make us pray.

Second thought to make us pray. do we share God's heart for lost people? You see, here is Jesus showing us God's heart.

And here is Jesus in the wider context of Luke as he's calling sinners to himself. Here he is filling the Father's house with guests. So remember the question that the crowd were asking at the beginning?

Why Jesus? Well, here is Rico Tyson in his wonderful little book Honest Evangelism. Probably the best book I've read on talking to your friends about Jesus if you're looking for something to buy and devour, maybe over the next week.

He writes this, puts it so beautifully, God is the great evangelist, the great seeker and finder of people, and he's called his followers to the same pursuit and to the same emotion.

[26 : 55] So here's what I want us to do just as we close this morning. I know that many of us have got good, good friends who we would love to see, we would love nothing more than to see them become Christians.

And I know for many of us here that we have parents and we have children who have perhaps wandered from the faith or people who we long to see in our families, one day bow the knee to Jesus and worship him.

And it's painful, isn't it, sometimes that the people that we love sometimes don't seem interested.

But here's what I want us to do just as we close. I want you to picture some people in your mind.

Just picture some people in your mind. And as you're thinking of them, just before you go this morning, why do you ask someone else this morning who they had in their minds?

Who has God placed in their hearts and minds? And why don't you pray for them as well this week?

But just as we close in the silence now, having seen the heart of God in Luke chapter 15, these people that are in our hearts and our minds, why don't we just bring them before our Father?

[28 : 10] Just now as we close, and then I'll close in prayer. let's pray together. So dear Father, we thank you that we've seen in Luke chapter 15 this morning that you are the great seeker of lost people.

And so dear Lord, we ask that by your spirit who is living in us, that you would install in us now your heart for a broken and lost world.

So Lord, we lift the names of those that we love to you, and we ask dear Father that you would be so gracious in finding them. Dear God, we praise you this morning, and we thank you for Jesus, and we pray in his name.

Amen.