

The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son

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Date: 31 July 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening again. It's a privilege to speak once again. We are partway through a series in Luke, where we've been looking at the parables on the Sunday evenings.

And tonight I would like to deal with Luke chapter 15. Now, we're not just going to deal with one parable, or even two, but all three that Alistair has read to us tonight.

And I'm hoping in the time that is available that we will get through them. Now, a quick recap of what a parable is. I think if you've been through Sunday school, we might have recited to the kids that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Now, Roy Zuck in his book, Basic Bible Interpretations, he puts it like this. He said it's a true-to-life story to illustrate or illuminate truth.

In other words, a short picture message that can help us to understand, that we can relate to and understand in order to grasp a truth that God intended us to comprehend.

[1 : 02] Now, I have a headed section on Luke chapter 15, Repentance, Restoration and Rejoicing, which helpfully starts with the letter R.

And I'm hoping that's something that you'll be able to remember. Now, the three R's once used to refer to reading, writing and arithmetic in the 19th and 20th century.

That was the kind of curriculum for education. I think as we've gotten to the 20th century, the three R's might stand for, I guess for us, if somebody was to ask you what the three R's are, then you might say that it's reduce, reuse or recycle.

Either way, the helpful letter of R will help us remember the key points. Whether that was the agenda for education or the agenda for living sustainably, I'm hoping tonight that these three R's you will be able to take away and it will help you remember the message that is contained within Luke 15, which is repentance, restoration and rejoicing.

It's one of the most important truths, and I think it's largely forgotten and ignored probably by the majority today. How good it is then when we come to the word of God that we have the confidence that what is said in Scripture is truth.

[2 : 23] And it's true. And it's as relevant for us today as it was when the Lord spoke it. So the big idea in Luke 15 is this, that it is something or someone that is lost and is found, and the celebration and the joy for those involved that comes afterwards.

When we talk about the word lost, we're referring to someone or something that is not in its rightful place. It's not with the person to whom it belongs, and therefore it is of no use to the owner.

We know this, if you take a £10 note and you lose it, it is of no use to us when we're at the supermarket checkout. Or a train ticket, when we lose it, it's of no use to us when we go to board the train.

We should note, however, though, that the value, it still has a value, right? So the £10 note still has a value, the train ticket still has a value for the proposed journey.

As we move on to this idea of being found, we are thinking of the opposite. We're thinking of something being back in its rightful place, back with its owner, back in service, right?

[3 : 31] Fulfilling its purpose, reconciled, restored. I'm sure there's many other things that you're thinking as I go through a list like that of what it means to be found. Restoration is a magnificent concept.

We often think about, and probably you watch programmes of houses and furniture and things that are restored. Maybe in a modern way, when your phone's software has gone a bit skewiff, a bit wonky, you might restore it back to its factory settings.

So you take it back to where it started from and it's in a state now that can be of use and it has a value to the owner. Similarly, this is the same with us and God.

You see, man was created by God and in his image and we were created to belong to him and to have a relationship or have a friendship with him. We'll see over these three parables what it means to God.

And I think if you've kept your Bibles open, you'll see this phrase repeated, for a sinner who repents. When they're found, when they're restored, when they're reconciled, when they are, we use a word that we use in a Christian context often as a word saved.

[4 : 45] When they are saved and we'll see what the outcome of that is. Now, just to put into a bit of context, the teaching ministry of the Lord in Luke chapter 14 seems to have attracted despised tax collectors and sinners.

People who were outwardly sinners. We see that when we get to chapter 19 with Zacchaeus. Somebody who was despised and he lived outwardly different from the Jews of that day.

Even though Jesus' message was clear, right? The way that he taught, the way that he preached, the way that he went out of business, it reproved their sin. Even though that was the case, many of them acknowledged that he was right.

And they took sides with Christ against themselves. In true repentance, they acknowledge him as their Lord. And we find that whenever that happens, Jesus is willing and he gravitates towards them.

And he bestows spiritual help and blessing upon them who act in this way. The difference is the Pharisees and the scribes resented this fact that Jesus fraternised with people who were avowedly sinners.

[5 : 57] And they did not show the grace and the humility that they should have shown to these people. And they resented Jesus for doing so.

In fact, at the beginning of our passage, Alistair read that they hurled this charge at him. That he came to eat, he received sinners and eats with them.

And they meant that as a kind of a slight against him, as a bit of a slur. But in actual fact, this was the fulfilment for the very purpose that the Lord Jesus came into the world.

We read that elsewhere in scripture, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. You see, God seeks out sinners. You see that right the way at the beginning of the book of Genesis, when God sought out Adam and Eve in the garden.

Right through to the words that we have quoted probably today about the Lord Jesus. In fact, I'm sure that Colin said that this morning. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Whereas the Jews, they kind of operated in a different way.

[7 : 00] They operated and they worked on their obedience to the law and modern personal purity to try and gain favour with God. And they were angry with Jesus and his actions for acting in this way.

I wonder if you can remember back to the beginning of July. On the 3rd of July, I spoke on the Good Samaritan. The Pharisees had totally forgotten that they were not able to gain favour with God in this way. And so the Lord Jesus goes on to then speak these three parables to illustrate the truth of repentance and restoration and rejoicing.

The first of these parables is a parable about the lost sheep. It's a clear picture story to the men and women in that day that they would easily have related to. Now, I think probably for us in Edinburgh, it's probably somewhat removed, right?

For us city dwellers, we don't tend to keep these kind of animals in our flats and our houses. So it's probably maybe slightly removed, but I'm sure that you can get the picture as to what the Lord is speaking about here.

This is a picture of these publicans and sinners who had become separated from the flock. The people who the Pharisees and the scribes despised. They were looked down on and they had become outcasts.

[8 : 13] As it was clear from their lives, right, that they lived in a very sinful way. As the story progresses, we read the question about the man to whom the sheep belonged, right?

And it's written as a rhetorical question. And I think this is a key thing to note. It's written as a question as this, that as if there was no doubt that the shepherd to whom they, or the one whom the sheep was lost, there's no doubt that he would go out and he would seek the lost sheep until he finds it.

You see, this sheep has been lost in its own foolishness. I don't know if you've seen sheep, but quite often if you're driving in the countryside, a sheep will have found a little gap in a fence and in its own wisdom it'll have gone through and it gets itself lost.

It's lost in its own wisdom and its own recklessness. In Isaiah we read the words, all have sinned and gone astray. We have turned, every one of us, to our own way. But the shepherd knows the value of the sheep.

Just like, as I mentioned, with the tempo note and the rail ticket, the sheep still has a value and the shepherd has a deep care for and an interest in its well-being. And so he sets out to look for the sheep.

[9 : 30] Now, I've already mentioned this in a Sunday school context. For those who have grown up in the Christian circles and gone to Sunday schools, you remember your Sunday school teacher would have really dramatised this type of story.

And, you know, maybe we can do that tonight. When we think about the shepherd who would have went out to look for the sheep and it would have been a long, hard journey, maybe even into the night, across hills and mountains.

And depending on how theatrical your Sunday school teacher might have been, you might have mentioned the fact that, you know, it faced the danger of meeting a lion or a bear, which is not outside the imagination of, you know, what we can think about what happened to that sheep.

The sheep itself, and I think we can appreciate this, the sheep itself would have been hungry and thirsty. It would have been distressed and in danger. And that is the point of a shepherd looking after a flock of sheep.

It keeps it safe. We often quote Psalm 23, but it keeps it safe. It looks after it. It leads it where it can get food and water. The sheep, on its own folly, has gotten itself into this position.

[10 : 42] Not able in its own strength, not in its own wisdom, to be able to return itself or make its own way back home. So the shepherd seeks until he finds it.

And he lovingly lifts the sheep and he puts it on his shoulders and he carries it home. Now, as we've been through these parables, we have lifted out some of the picture language that the Lord is trying to present.

And in this story, it's a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus right here. That he would search for lost sinners and carry them home. Not on our own might or our strength or by our own understanding or our wisdom, but by his love and his grace.

And upon reaching home, the shepherd calls his friends and his neighbours and he rejoices. Now, this is not some kind of cheap party where we go to forget our worries and our woes.

But this is a deep satisfaction. That the sheep that was lost is now back in its rightful place. It is now restored to the one to whom it belongs.

[11 : 48] Jesus makes it clear that this speaks of the joy that is found in heaven over one sinner who repents. Actually, Scripture says that there is more joy over one sinner who repents.

Who realises that they are wrong and that by repenting agrees with God over their sin and the way that they live. And also the way to be right with God. Not by our works or wisdom, but by the saving power of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus refers to himself in another place in Scripture of the good shepherd. As far as he's concerned, the journey of the shepherd includes his descent into this earth, his public ministry, his rejection, his suffering, his death.

And how true... This might be an old one for some people in the audience. I'm sure most of you will know it. But how true is the lines from the hymn, the 99. We don't sing it anymore, but it says this, 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.

I think the lesson is clear. There is joy, and this is one of the key points of Luke 15 that we often gloss over, but there is joy in heaven over one sinner who depends.

[13 : 09] But there's a small section just at the end of that in verse 7. There is no joy over the 99 sheep or the sinners who are not convicted of their lost condition.

That verse doesn't actually mean that there are some people for whom need no repentance. For we understand well in other places that all of us are sinners and that we all must repent in order to be saved.

The verse instead describes those, as far as they see themselves, who need no repentance. That kind of leads us on to verse 8, which is the next parable that the Lord speaks about.

And it's similar to the first. We find a story that the hearers would have known well. And I've done a little bit of research. I don't think it particularly matters, but this coin would have been belonged to as part of a set.

It appears in the Jewish tradition that as part of an engagement arrangement or a wedding necklace, there would have been a necklace or some kind of headband that would have had 10 coins in it.

[14 : 21] And the person to whom it belongs loses one. Now, as I was preparing for this, I was remembering a story a good number of years ago, probably back in 2005, when my sister, yeah, 2005, we were going through my cousin's baptism in East Ayrshire, and she'd taken off a ring and she'd popped it in her hat with other bits and pieces and she had moisturised her hands on the journey, as I'm sure some of you guys will know.

And then when she'd finished, she'd popped her hat back on and we'd gone into the hall in Galveston. And only when she was sitting in the seat did she realise that she had lost her engagement ring.

And I'm sure that you can all just imagine the panic and the distress that ensued. Well, it's similarly as part of this story as well. Palestinian houses would have been fairly dark, not like what we have today with electric lights and smooth walls and level floors and all such like.

It would have been a completely different house. And the same rhetorical question is asked, who wouldn't do this? If you had lost a coin, who wouldn't do this?

And Jesus, in asking that question, Jesus is explaining the concern and the care that he has for those who are lost. And therefore, that he would then seek those who were lost.

[15 : 46] Now remember, this is in the context of the Pharisees who are looking on angrily. Jesus is explaining these parables to them. So the woman lights the lamp and she searches until she finds that lost coin.

And we can just imagine her joy, like my sister Gwen, finding that in the street later. In fact, she actually found it in her hat that was on her head. But she had searched up and down the street and it was only until she took her hat off that she found this engagement ring.

Well, similarly for the woman, verse 8 says that she swept her house and looked diligently. And this kind of gives us an idea as to the value and the worth of the coin. She searches really carefully and I think that also gives us the idea of just how far she was willing to go and to the extent and desire that she wanted to find that coin that was lost.

Now, again, like the point in the first parable, she too calls her friends and her neighbours and rejoices once she has found that coin. Now, I think in both of these stories and both of these parables, it's easy for us to take them granted because I don't necessarily think that we are that invested.

Maybe in the second story for the women in here that have lost or maybe the men that have bought the ring but certainly if you've lost your engagement ring, you might be a bit more invested. But in terms of the sheep, we might not be invested as much because I don't suppose there's any farmers in here tonight.

[17 : 10] But the people in them days, the Pharisees described and all of the people that would have been gathered there listening to the Lord Jesus would have known the impact of these stories quite acutely. As lost, both of these items have no value to the owner but they're not worthless as we mentioned previously.

But they're not useful, right? To the owner, there is dead. And Jesus was actually saying that God searches out for sinners who are in this condition. No wonder that the Pharisees and the scribes are offended by this, right?

There's no place in their legalistic theology for a God like this. And as I mentioned as we opened up, God searches for sinners. We see that right away from the beginning of our Bibles in Genesis chapter 3 for Adam and Eve when they had sinned and they had hidden themselves from God.

God comes out and searches for them. And in spite of their supposed knowledge of scriptures, the scribes and the Pharisees forgot that God actually is like a father who pities his wayward children.

Now there are a few joys that match those, that match the joy of finding the lost and bringing them to the saviour. A quote from John Wesley says this, that the church has nothing to do but to see souls saved and therefore we should spend and be spent in this work.

[18 : 32] Now that brings me on to the biggest section in Luke chapter 15 verses 11 to 32 where Jesus really elaborates on the message that he is communicating about the need for repentance and the need for restoration and the joy and the rejoicing that this brings to those involved.

I think quite often when we look at these parables we quite often focus on the repentance part. We may focus a little bit on the restoration but I really think that quite often we miss the fact that there is real deep satisfaction and joy over one sinner who repents.

Now I'm sure, in fact Alice had already mentioned this but I'm sure if you've been around in Christian circles you might have heard this parable being referred to as the parable of the lost son or the parable of the lost of the two sons but I think it could also be called the parable of the loving father.

I think it emphasises as you look at it again I think it emphasises the graciousness of the father more than it does the sinfulness of the son. But unlike the shepherd and the woman the father in this parable does not go out and seek the son but it is instead the memory of the father's goodness that brought the son to repentance and forgiveness.

Romans chapter 2 verse 4 says this So let's have a look at some of the details within this part of the chapter.

[20 : 15] From the start we see that the son did not understand the father. He did not want to work for the father he did not want to live by his rules and he didn't want to, I don't think this is pushing it too far from the context of his mourning but I don't think he actually wanted the father to be alive that's why he goes on then and asks for the portion of goods that would have come to him in the event of his father's death.

I think as sinners we have all been in this situation at some point that we have not wanted to live in that environment. When the son comes and asks for the portion of goods I think again from a little bit of research that this could have been allowed in kind of Jewish law whether it was common or not it was certainly allowed.

I don't know at what point in a father's life that he would have accepted it but certainly this would have happened before so I don't think this is too unusual. Now in Jewish law which is probably not similar today but the elder son would have received a bigger portion maybe even double a portion to the son or other sons that his father would have given his estate to.

The father divides the estate and gives to the son as we read both sons actually as we read in verse 12 and then as you come down if you've still got your Bibles open into verse 31 you'll see that the father reminds him of this when he says all of this that I have belongs to that elder son but we'll leave him there for the time being and I just want to focus on the younger son just now.

See the younger son imagined that this would allow him to go and enjoy and live as he wanted by his own rules and enjoy the freedom and all that that this would bring.

[22 : 03] He kind of shunned his father and it shows that his heart was far away from him. He rejected the safety and the joy that that provided. The son had the choice once he had received the portion of the goods that were going to befall him he had a choice to make but as he has considered this and I guess through the story you can see this that the perspective the son's perspective of the father was skewed and this is why he acts in this way he doesn't understand his father he wanted to live separated from him.

Now I think we need to probably understand some of the kind of cultural differences of that day and I think when we start to look at a bigger picture in scripture you see this that they would have lived much more in familial settings so they would have lived in large family circles and we only read about two sons here but they would have lived in large family circles servants and workers would have been part of that domestic situation.

I think in this day and age we're probably removed somewhat from that kind of familial setting we live in relative affluence we've got social safety and welfare and if you look even in Edinburgh there's many homes that are just occupied by single people so we're a little bit removed but what we're not removed from is children who do not want to live under the guidance of their parents nor are we removed from people who want to live recklessly.

The son goes off and he lives as he wants the word prodigal means exactly that it means wasteful one who spends money wastefully who lives recklessly extravagant and you know similar today we see people living in that same way who just want to live with reckless abandon we smiled as I was putting this together with this quote that probably many of us have used YOLO you live as you want you live as you please you only live once so let's go and do it.

Well the younger son he ends up in a situation that this extravagant living exhausts the resources that he has and in addition to this there's a depression that comes over the land and the fun and the friends and all that he enjoyed comes to an end and evaporates right times are tight and he finds himself forced to do for a stranger what he wouldn't do for his father and that is to go to work to live and to work in that way I think this is I think this scene in the parable is the Lord's way of emphasising what sin really does in the lives of those who reject the father's will sin promises freedom but it brings slavery it promises success but it brings failure it promises happiness but it brings misery it promises life but we read that the wages of sin is death and for most of us that know who have repeated that many times we know that that is that word for separation when God is left out of our lives enjoyment becomes enslavement and we become slaves to this world and the master and its masters instead of the one who created us the man finds himself in a pigsty feeding pigs and the Bible and Alice has read this but the Bible reminds us that he would have filled his belly with what he was feeding to the pigs it tells us that the money that he was receiving for this job that he was doing wasn't even enough to buy him food and he is he's just brought low and in his misery his mind is taken back to his father's home and as he thinks about home and about his father he sees his father in a new light he sees his father as the father always was and continues to be and we'll see that as we move on no longer just the guidance right you can appreciate this not just the guidance and the rules that are part and parcel of living at home but also the peace and the joy and the stability that that affords and the better conditions that he as he's sitting there in the field feeding the pigs he it comes to mind that even the even his even the servants that work for his dad have enough to eat and to live comfortably they make enough money for them to buy food but as he's sitting there he doesn't just pity himself feel sad and then go on his way regardless as many of us do when we are in a kind of situation like that and I think this is

[26 : 46] I think this is where it gets to the kind of absolute thrust of the message that Jesus is teaching he wanted them to understand what it is to be truly repentant in this parable about the son who sees his father in a new light it's in the right light with clarity of mind and he agrees with himself in that when he was sitting there considering his father's home and all that was all that he could enjoy in his father's home he saw his father in this in this in the right light so it wasn't it wasn't that his father had changed but just in his mind he sees his father in the right light and he acknowledges and agrees within himself that the father's way was best the son is repentant and what do I mean by that well it means that he changes his mind about his father and not only does he change his mind but he goes on to show that in his response a complete change right had he just stopped here he would only have he would only have experienced regret and remorse but true repentance true repentance involves not just the will but it involves the will as well as just the mind and the emotions the son resolves and I think this is part of it the son resolves and he says this he says

I will arise and I will go and I will say and this is what our response needs to be verse 18 he says this I will arise and I will go to my father and I will say to him father I have sinned against heaven and before you see the young man he just can't remain he cannot remain this is what he's saying to himself I can't remain here as I am in this condition he recognises that he has wronged his father and he has failed to live up to the standards of his son and he is truly sorry he changes his mind not only about himself and about his situation but he admits that he's a sinner when he goes back he says father I have sinned against heaven and before you in that and I never finished the rest of the verse but in that he recognises and I think this is key for us he recognises that his father was a generous man and that service at home is far better than freedom in the far country you see for us

I think it's God's goodness not just man's badness that leads us to repentance you know if the young man had only thought about himself about his hunger about his loneliness about his homesickness he would have despaired there's no hope in that situation but his painful circumstances helps him see his father in a new way and this this is what brought about him hope if the father was good so good to servants then maybe he would be willing to forgive a son and this this is the part of the story that brings joy to your heart as the man as the young man approaches home his father sees him in the distance and I got a text this morning just to remind me that the father runs and greets him and kisses him and brings him home and he asks for the best to be done for his son we see that the son didn't even get to finish his confession and yet the father is ready to act and receive him with joy in fact it's this in the same text a good friend that texted him this morning just to encourage me he had quoted a line that my grandfather used and I'm sure there's a few lines that will come out but one of the lines that my grandfather used he said this he said he kissed him when he still had the smell of pigs upon him now you know when we think about us

God receives us as repentant sinners not as polished Pharisees but as repentant sinners in the condition that we repent to God now the son did not deserve this given the way that he had spurned his father he disrespected him he disappeared from him and yet we see the goodness and the kindness in the fact that the father still loved the wayward son and he too like the first two in the first two parables he too is filled with joy and he invites his family and his friends to rejoice and to celebrate with him for he says this for my son was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found now the Pharisees listening to this and I asked you earlier on just to park the older brother but the Pharisees that were listening to this are shown as the older brother they claim to have served God all this time but in reality their hearts are far from the father note you'll see that in the verse there that the older son actually wants the same as the younger son as he asks he says you never give me a fatted calf so I could go off and enjoy it with my friends and not with his father and that is why

Jesus' parable is fully understood when we see that each one of us are in this parable somewhere now for the majority of us it would have been in this prodigal son but there might be some of us who are who are sitting here like a Pharisee just not considering the fact that there are people Jesus came to seek and to save that were lost the Pharisees were annoyed at the fact that the Lord Jesus was eaten that he was received as sinners and eaten with them and that is the extent that the Lord Jesus tells these three parables and there might be some of us that sometimes act in this way that we are just a little bit annoyed that there are people who live an outwardly sinful life and yet God is willing as the loving father in this story to receive them when they are truly repentant but we can see ourselves all of us in this room today can see ourselves in this parable none of us have been living as we should and that is why the Bible says and reminds us that we've all sinned and we've fallen short of the standard that God expects we've already quoted

[32 : 53] Isaiah that all we like sheep have gone astray and we read elsewhere in scripture that there's a way that seems right to man but the end thereof is destruction so what does that mean for us today then how do we take this passage and how are we to apply it do these three R's that I've mentioned resonate with us the Bible tells us that God is the same yesterday and today and forever and so we come to learn that these principles are indeed relevant for us you see as sinners we must repent if we are to be accepted by God we must accept that like sheep we have disobeyed God and we have become lost in the folly of our own wisdom like the coin we are unable to find ourselves and you know the far country exists in our hearts right for we are in a natural state we are far from God Colossians 1 21 says this and you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds repentance is about changing our mind and seeing that the way that we live is an affront to our maker it's accepting that by that God's design and desire for our lives is the only way that we should have been living but the point one of the points in this the three R's repentance restoration but there is a piece in here that reminds us that we can be restored we can be brought back into relationship with God through the death and the resurrection of his son the Lord Jesus he said

I am the way that this can happen he said I am the life he came to give he came to give us life John 10 10 reminds us I am come that they might have life and they might have it abundantly just following on for that verse that I quoted in Colossians 1 and 22 it says this but now he has reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present us holy and blameless and above reproach before him like the clothes that the father presented to the son to demonstrate that he was his son as restored people we are clothed in Jesus righteousness as we stand before God and our father sees us as righteous as his son Jesus and that brings us on to this the last R which is rejoicing you see joy is deep satisfaction and delight both for the seeking saviour and for the saved individual and this is what brings joy to the waiting father if you are repentant and have been restored reconciled to God then this parable tells us that the joy that fills heaven and should fill our hearts the Christian life as we probably all know from what we think about on our prayer newsletters from Brunsfield the Christian life can be tough but as a true believer we experience that deep joy when we are right with God so as I finish

I want to encourage us not to forget about these three R's repentance restoration and rejoicing and if you have not found that deep peace and joy that is afforded by the Lord Jesus then I just ask that you consider this message that there is joy over one sinner who repents and the father is waiting to forgive those who come to him now before I hand over to Alistair I just want to pray for us and I just want us to consider these three R's as we think about what's been said tonight our heavenly father we come before you we thank you that in your word we find stories like this simple stories that we can understand and that we can remember and that we can just see the truth that you have for us our father we thank you that this reminds us that you are a loving father and that you have our interests at heart and our father even before the dawn of time you had salvation's plan and that you are willing to send your son to come and to seek and to save that which was lost our father we thank you for our salvation for those who have come to put their trust and faith in the Lord Jesus our father we thank you that you are willing to accept and forgive us our father we just ask that as we have thought about this that we might just consider our lives and our father that all of us might just be repentant and how we live that displeases you and how that we are often far from you and our father we just ask that as we consider this tonight that your word would speak to us that might just ring in our hearts and our minds and our father we just pray that as we just consider this message tonight that you indeed will be glorified in sinners that seek you and that are saved and so our father we just commit this time to you we give you thanks for it and we do so in the name of our Lord

Jesus Amen Goodagen