

## The Parables

### Luke 15: 1-10

### (Lost Sheep and Lost Coin)

### “Lost and Found”

#### Introduction

A good friend of mine was telling me about his trip to the holy land several years back. He said that his church group hired a local tour bus driver who was Jewish (but not a Christian as I recall) to drive them around the country to see the various Biblical landmarks. My friend told me that he had an excellent time in Jerusalem seeing the place where Jesus was crucified and the empty tomb, but the most memorable event of the entire trip actually occurred quite by coincidence. Of course, I have come to realize that a coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous! The tour bus stopped along the roadside to look at a large flock of sheep grazing on the hillside.

The driver pulled the bus over and decided that this would be a nice place to have lunch. One of the members of my friends tour group noticed a lone shepherd off in the distance waving his arms and running away from the flock. Not knowing what was happening, the entire group watched as the shepherd drifted out of sight over the next rise. As they all speculated as to what was going on, they saw the form of the shepherd reappear on a distant ridge. As he came closer, they could see that he was carrying a sheep across his shoulders and returning to the large flock. My friend told me when they saw this shepherd bringing back that lost sheep, the whole tour group began to weep and shout cries of joy as they were overcome with emotion. The driver thought that they had all lost their minds, but how could he have known what a powerful image this was to anyone who has ever been lost and found by the grace of God? It was a real life illustration of one of the most beloved parables in all of scripture. The parable of The Lost Sheep.

The Parable of The Lost Sheep (Also known as “the ninety and nine”) can be found in Luke chapter fifteen. It is actually one part of a trilogy of parables; The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Prodigal Son. Jesus told these three stories to help the Pharisees to understand the true value of a lost soul to a Holy God. The Pharisees hated the common man. They even had a term for them. They called them “The people of the land”. Anyone whom they did not deem worthy of acceptance was treated as an outcast in the circles of the Pharisees. They prided themselves upon being members of an exclusive club of God’s elite. What they failed to comprehend was that their self-righteous attitude was in fact an offense to God. For it is God’s desire is that no man should perish, but rather to come in repentance and receive everlasting life through Jesus Christ, His Son (2 Peter 3:9). When no one else cares for you, Jesus does! You are a priceless treasure in the eyes of God. He sent His son to die on a cross so that we who were lost could be found. That is what true love does.

The Pharisees refused to accept Jesus as being from God. One of their reasons for rejecting Him was the company that He kept. Verse one of this passage tells us that they were offended that **“This man welcomes sinners and EATS with them”**. In the culture of Jesus time, to eat with someone was to share a bond. A Pharisee would not be caught dead having a meal with someone that He considered to be a “person of the land”, a commoner. They kept such people at a distance where they belonged. To be loved by God, in their eyes, was to keep themselves separate from sinners. What they didn’t realize was that God Himself was actually there among them, and He was far more concerned with loving the undesirables, than He was the self-righteous! The God-Man Jesus was showing them the very heart of His Father, and yet they refused to see Him because of their own prejudices.

In an attempt to help them understand the deep, deep love of the Father, He illustrates it for them in three separate, but inseparable parables. The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son. Today we will examine the first two of these parables as we glimpse into the very heart of God. There are three separate components that we will find in each of these parables. The Lost, The Found, and The Celebrated.

## **The Lost**

Shepherds were considered the lowest class of people in Jesus time. After all, a shepherd was basically a homeless person. They were not the owners of their flocks, but merely poor people hired to live among them. Shepherds were not even allowed to testify in court because their lowly status made them untrustworthy witnesses (or so it was reckoned). They were social outcasts of society. Women on the other hand, though they were accepted by society, were seen culturally as second class citizens, and yes, even the personal property of their husbands. A woman had no standing among the community apart from that of her husband. It is not by accident that Christ chooses these two particular examples to represent Himself in these two parables. The Pharisees would have been absolutely shocked that He would compare God to a shepherd or a woman! But, the Bible tells us that Jesus made himself nothing in order that we might be saved (**Philippians 2:7**).

The shepherd in the first parable notices while doing his routine counting of the flock that one has gone missing. This would have brought a sense of panic to the shepherd, for the flock was not his. It had simply been entrusted to his care. To lose any part of the flock would have been considered a failure to perform his duties as a shepherd. This lost sheep wasn't simply a dumb animal. It was priceless to the shepherd. He leaves the flock to begin his search for it immediately, fearing the worst, but hoping for the best.

As many of you know, I raise sheep. They can be a real handful at times. They rarely seem to be satisfied and are forever looking for a hole in the fence that they can wriggle through. The sheep's motto seems to be that the grass is forever greener on the other side. They are not a fan of boundaries, and when they can't find their way through the fence, they will often stand and stare through the woven wire, as if to gaze upon an unreachable land of promise just beyond their border. It is not as if I do not see to it that they have an ample supply of feed and water. It just seems that they can never be satisfied with it. Sound familiar?

We too have a wandering eye and a natural dislike to borders being put around us. I am reminded here of the old cowboy song, "*Don't Fence Me In*". God has given us rules to live by, and yet we seem intent upon pushing the boundaries time and again. Can I get a witness? We, like sheep, tend to rebel against our fences. King David was a man well acquainted with the whole shepherd thing. He wrote in **Psalms 16:6**; "**The boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places for me.**" Just what was David saying? He was accepting God's plan and statutes for his life. He had grown to understand that God only wants the best for us, and that He will supply our every need. We don't need to go looking across the fence, for the pasture that we have been given is sufficient. God sets our boundaries not to deprive us, but to protect us. There are predators lurking outside those fence rows who would love to take us down, but we don't seem to notice them as we gaze lustfully across the fence line. Thankfully God does.

When a sheep first finds a hole in the fence at my place, I notice that it will stay pretty close to it for a time. But, little by little, it wanders farther and farther away as it searches for more grass. I had three sheep escape a few years ago, and I finally found them grazing in a neighbor's pasture about three miles away. They had gone so far with their head to the ground seeing only the grass directly in front of them, that they had no idea how to get back to the barn lot for protection when night fell. That is exactly what many people do who stray into sin. They didn't start out with a plan to go that far away, but, little by little, they wound up hopelessly lost with no idea how to be found. No one ever says, I want to be a prostitute when I grow up, or an alcoholic, or a drug addict. It just happens, little by little, day by day, and bit by bit.

The enticements of sin will lead you farther and farther away from the fold, until one day you realize that you are in serious peril. Some never realize it, and they perish. Others begin to cry out for the Shepherd, who has been out searching for them through the night. Enter the woman and the lost coin. The first time that I read this I will admit that I was a bit confused. I mean who gets that upset over a single coin. The coin was only worth a day's wages, and while I understand that a day's wages is something, it doesn't seem worth getting as frantic about as the woman in the story seems to be. Then, after further study I realized the significance. Women in the middle east were required to have a dowry before they could get married. The reason for this was that in those days girls would be very useful in helping their father doing chores around the farm. To lose a daughter was to give up a source of labor.

Any young man who wished to marry a young girl in those days would have been required to come to some sort of financial arrangement with her father.

The father would then take a portion of that money, usually ten coins, for ten is the number of testimony and give it to his daughter as her part of the dowry. These coins were sewed onto the front of the woman's headdress for all to see. The coins that dangled from the headdress were a sign for all to see that she was a legitimately married woman with a dowry. Creditors were not allowed by law to ask for these coins even in the event of any past due debts owed by the family. The coins couldn't be taken from the woman. In the event of a divorce no man could take any of the things from his wife that she wore upon her body. Clothes, jewelry, and the coins upon her headband were hers, and hers alone. She could give them to her husband if the need arose, but he could not take them from her. To lose any one of these valuable coins would be the equivalent of a woman today losing a precious stone from her wedding ring. Now can you see why the woman in the parable was so desperate to find her coin?

Here is the simple truth of these parables. A person who is lost is a priceless treasure to God. He wants them found. He loves these "lost treasures" and will go to any length to find them, because that is what love does (**John 3:16**). The Pharisees just couldn't understand how these "undesirables" were so drawn to Christ, but the reason was simple. He loved them. He wanted to bring them into a place of acceptance with the Father. He wanted to bring them back into the sheepfold. He wanted to restore that which had been lost. They were precious to Him. Like lost sheep in the wilderness, He could hear their cries, and He answered. Like the lost coin, they were destined to belong to the church, they were the dowry of the Bride of Christ. They were meant to be inseparable from Her, and He purchased them with his own blood, so that they would never be lost again!

### **The Found**

In both parables the searchers never give up until they find their lost treasures. The lost sheep is carried back to the fold upon the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. Jesus not only found each of us when we were lost, but He did all the work to bring us back into the fold. We didn't find Him. He found us! And, it was HE, and HE alone, that brought us back to The Father's sheepfold. **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:9)"**. In other words, You have been saved, because The Shepherd heard your cries for mercy and came and carried you home on His shoulders. You were lost, but now you are found. If you've not thanked Him for that in a while, now might be a good time!

As for the woman who searches for her lost coin, houses in ancient Palestine were small and dark, with no windows. They usually had either dirt or rough stone floors. The woman, upon realizing she has lost one of her prized dowry coins, takes a broom and a lamp into the darkness to search for her missing treasure. I absolutely LOVE the imagery of this story. Why? Because I believe that it is a picture of Christ and his Church. What has the church been called over and over again? The light of the world (**Matthew 5:14**). In the book of **Revelation**, which we just finished studying, the seven churches are described as the seven lampstands (**Rev. 1:20**). Notice how the woman uses her lamp to find the lost coin. Unlike a sheep, who wanders off, a coin is lost by a sudden fall. Her coin had become lost, most likely between the rough stones of her floor, or under the dirt of the floor. A lamp and a broom were employed to find it.

The lamp and broom are beautiful images of Christ's redeeming work done through His Church. Jesus has placed His church as a lamp in this darkened world to find His lost treasures. We are to sweep away the filthiness of sin to find them wherever they may be. This earth is filled with the fallen, just like the lost coin, who need to be found. We must not leave them behind, for they are as much an important part to the Bride of Christ as the coins on the Jewish woman's headpiece. They are a part of His dowry for The Church. He died to purchase them. They are priceless to Him and should be to us as well. We will find them hidden in the crevices of their sin and depravity, as we shine the light of Christ to illuminate their darkness with the truth of His gospel of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. They are hidden treasure just waiting to be found. We have been called to reach, rescue, restore, and release them so that they too can make disciples of the lost and found. There is no higher purpose in life than to be found by Christ and then to help others to be found as well. Do you know someone today who needs finding?

Then go after them with the light of the gospel. Be willing to sweep away the filth to bring them into the light. Do not let them be forgotten. They are precious to Christ.

### **The Celebrated**

At the end of each of the three parables given in **Luke 15**, there is a celebration. Jesus wants us to understand that every time a lost sinner is found, there is a party going on in heaven. Salvation is a cause for celebration! Every time I see a baptism, I get a lump in my throat, for I know that one more lost sinner has been found! Can I ask you a question this morning? Are you where you need to be with God? Have you wandered away from the safety of the sheepfold? No matter what everyone else has told you, and no matter what what you even think about yourself, you are precious to Christ. He suffered and died upon a cross to pay for everything that you have ever done, or ever will do. Your sin can be forgiven and forgotten forever today. All you have to do is ask. Call out to the good shepherd like a lost sheep in the wilderness and let Him come and find you. Allow Him to carry you home on His shoulders. Wouldn't you like to trade in all your sorrow and shame for the forgiveness, joy, and peace that comes from knowing Christ? He is searching for you today; searching to see that every lost treasure is found and celebrated, for there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels before God over one sinner who repents (**vs. 10**). Surrender yourself to Christ. Your church family is waiting to celebrate with you!

**And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!**