
All the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the experts in the law were complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³He told them this parable: ⁴"Which one of you, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls together his friends and his neighbors, telling them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!' ⁷I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

⁸"Or what woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, would not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found the lost coin.' ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

As the Pharisees and experts in the law walked into the room, they saw a sight that almost made them gasp. This Jesus they had been following was dining with the cheating tax collectors and other scummy people of society. Remember that a short time before this Jesus sat down to eat with these Pharisees and their rich and powerful friends and had told them not to dine with the people who could make their lives easy. Instead, they were to dine with the poor and needy. Well, even though Jesus had told them that and was now walking the walk, they were still disgusted. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," they said. So, Jesus told them three parables. We'll focus in on the first two today.

In the first, a man has one hundred sheep, but one wanders off. Having one hundred sheep meant this man was rich. It would not have been wild for him to write off the lost one as the cost of doing business, but he doesn't. He goes after it. And when he finds it, he carries it home on his shoulders, calling his friends and neighbors to rejoice that he has recovered his lost sheep. Jesus then says, "I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent."

In the second parable, there is a woman who has ten Greek drachmas, about ten days' worth of work. But she loses one, and instead of saying "it'll turn up when it turns up," she lights her lamp and searches her entire house throughout the night until she finds it. Then she too calls her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her in finding her lost coin. Jesus concludes with something similar to the first parable: "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

It is clear that Jesus is speaking a hard truth in response to the Pharisees who were disgusted. They had no patience for sinners. In fact, they rejoiced at the demise of anyone who was against God. They saw no grace in God and desired no grace from God. They wanted all wickedness to meet its punishment, just not theirs.

Do we get uppity about our faith too? Maybe we're not as vocal about it as the Pharisees, but our love for the lost is lacking just as much as theirs. We have a better understanding of the grace of God, yet we want him to punish the evil that is around us. We don't have compassion on those people who espouse ungodly ideas. Instead, we want them silenced or at least far enough away from us that we don't have to hear it because we are so angered by them. I think all of us would say we love the lost, but it seems everything we do says the opposite. We want to see that person who profanes God's name every time we see them fail. Deep down we want that relative who's been living in sin to crawl back to us in humiliation, not because they realize the error

in their ways, but because it will make us feel right. It's that old German term "Schadenfreude," not a love for the lost, but a love for the misfortune of others.

Because by nature we are selfish, our hearts don't go out to the lost. But they should, because we were in the exact same place. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked when you followed the ways of this present world." By nature, we were spiritually dead. And you know dead. When something is dead, it can't do anything on its own. Paul also writes to the Romans, "For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot." By nature, we were enemies of God. We wanted nothing to do with him. Finally, we hear from David in a psalm he wrote after being confronted with his sins of adultery and murder: "Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me." By nature, we were sinful from birth, sinful even from conception. And so, if we were spiritually dead, enemies of God, and sinners by nature, I think it's fair to say we were once lost.

And not only were we lost, but we were also worthless. If you lose something nice and valuable, it's worth trying to find it. But if you drop a penny a mile back, you're probably not going to trudge back there to find it. We were the one sheep of the hundred. The shepherd had ninety-nine more. Why leave them to track us down? We were the measly little coin. The woman had nine more. Why scour the house to find us?

Here's the heart of our God on full display. Yes, we were lost. Yes, we were worthless. But he loves the lost. He sees the worthless as priceless in his sight. So, he makes the biggest gesture of love ever made. He does more than write us a nice valentine. He goes further than sending us flowers. He delivers his one and only Son into the world to become worthless for us. We've been rescued by our shepherd. We've been found by our owner.

But we still get lost. We still wander away like the sheep in our own foolishness. We know it's bad, but it's just too tempting. Or we get lost in the dirt like the coin in our ignorance to the threats around us. We get so caught up in the circumstances of our lives that we forget just how important it is to be connected to the Savior. For both of these, it doesn't happen all at once. Like a stubborn man driving without solid directions, we don't recognize we're lost until we're really lost.

But our God comes and finds us. His rescue comes by family members. It comes by brothers and sisters in the faith at church. It even comes by God allowing hardships in our lives that shake us up and wake us up to the reality that we're far from where we think we are.

Our Lord finds us because God wants us connected to him by the Means of Grace, the ways he brings his gospel message to us, his word and the sacraments. The one who ate with sinners continues to seek out sinners because he loves the lost, and he calls us to rejoice when they are found.

Even though our human nature tells us to hate the lost, when we recall that we were lost, it leads us to rejoice with others. The God who showed and continues to show grace to us washed-up sinners works to show that grace to others too. And he tells us that when one of the lost is found, there is rejoicing by the angels in heaven.

This love of our Savior for us motivates us to chase the sheep and light the lamps to find the lost coin. Jesus commands it in the Great Commission, as he tells us to make disciples. But sometimes we ourselves are hesitant to seek the lost and straying. We're not so quick to hear his call and rush out into the world to seek the lost. Why?

Maybe it's because we're angry at the person who's lost. Maybe we had a bitter argument and we seethe with anger anytime we have to be in the same room as them. Perhaps, it's because we have some anxiety about

having a hard conversation with them. Maybe the reason they're lost is because of some sin they committed. In love we might have to speak words that hurt, and we are never excited to do that. It can be even harder to speak the truth about their sin when we've committed that same sin. It could even be that we are hesitant to find the lost because of indifference. This indifference might seem ok, but it's indifference to the commands of Jesus to grab the shepherd's crook and light the lamp. It's us trying to redefine love, because the love Jesus calls us to here can get really uncomfortable.

What's the cost of allowing the lost to stay lost? The cost is their eternal well-being. I think we sometimes fall into the trap of saying, "If God wants it to happen, he'll make sure it happens." But what if you are the tool that God is working to use? We don't say, "If God wants me to eat, he'll put food on my table." Instead, we say, "God wants me to eat and has given me the strength to work to put food on my table." That whole, "if God wants it, he'll make it happen apart from me" attitude rejects the notion that God brings light to the lost through people speaking God's word. The cost of us sitting on our hands can be the difference between heaven and hell.

And that leads us to another cost of letting the lost stay lost. Jesus' parables are not telling the lost how to be found. Their focus is on the one doing the finding. The prerogative is on us. When we refuse to show someone their sin and offer forgiveness when they repent, it affects our spiritual well-being.

As a church, we know people who are lost. We know people who are in our church directory, yet we haven't seen them for years. Now, they might be a little lost or they might be way off the map, but what does it matter? They are disconnected from hearing their Savior's voice regularly. They have ceased receiving that meal that brings forgiveness of sins and life. We know the dangers of being disconnected from the means of grace in our own lives. Whether it was before we came to faith or when we've fallen into seasons of wandering, we know what it's like to be disconnected from the Lord. Shouldn't we care about all the others who are disconnected as well?

Let's endeavor to see that no one slips through the cracks. Let's make sure that we are using our time and energy to find the straying and remind them of the great love for the lost Jesus has for them. It's going to take all of us. Thinking someone else will do it instead rejects the call Jesus gives. And it's going to take some bravery. Jesus sitting down to eat with sinners and shows them their sins was not as simple as family dinner. Not writing people off is going to mean meeting people where they are at with the gospel. Finally, it's going to take patience. We always expect hearts to be changed thousands at a time like at Pentecost, but more often they're changed one-by-one.

It's not going to be easy, but it will be worth more than nearly anything else you do in your life. One-by-one those living in darkness will see the great light of Jesus. And when the lost return, we will rejoice with the angels in heaven.