

Lost and Found

Luke 15:1-32

At David's school there is a box in the hallway. On any given day you can peer into the box and find items like a thermos, a single glove, a baseball cap, a jacket, a book, or even a pair of boots. On the front of the box is a label. It reads "lost and found".

You have seen boxes just like that. You have probably even looked in them hoping to find something you lost. It's the place where items may end up that have been left behind, inadvertently, and no, if you lost your mind you won't find it in the lost and found box. That's another department.

Amusement parks have a place for children who get separated from parents. They end up in the custody of staff who look after them until the parents are located and identifies that the child belongs to them.

It can be very disconcerting to lose something of value, especially a child. At last year's Home plate I lost David for what seemed like an eternity. We were going to use the restroom on the mezzanine before the game. Usually in large crowds like that I hold his hand so we don't get separated. For some reason we didn't on this particular occasion. When I reached the restroom and looked behind me he wasn't there. My heart sunk. I was distraught. I couldn't find him. I became frantic as I scanned the sea of humanity. Fortunately when he lost sight of me he had the sense to go back to where some of our group was gathered.

What has been the greatest item of value that you have lost? How did you feel during the search to find it? Once it was found did you place a greater value on the item?

Through our passage today Jesus illustrates the value of something lost. Let's keep in mind the purpose of Jesus coming. He made it abundantly

clear that He came to "seek and to save the lost."

Through His illustration He shows us that there is value in something that is wayward, value in something that is worthless, and value in something that is willful. Before we see that we need to make an observation, and then take a look at an objection.

I. AN OBSERVATION – v. 1

There are three groups of people around Jesus on this particular day. We meet two of them in the opening verses. The other is assumed. The group we assume to be included are those 12 men who have attached themselves to Jesus as disciples. They are learning from Him their role as disciples, to continue on His mission of seeking the lost. Everywhere He goes, they go. So we make an assumption that they are with Jesus now.

We meet the next group in verse 1. They are the tax collectors and sinners. Tax collectors were Jewish agents hired by Rome to collect taxes. Rome expected a certain amount to be collected. These guys set their own rules and established their own rate. It was inflated for their own selfish purpose. Matthew had been among this group before Jesus touched his life and called him to follow. Because of their association with Rome they were despised and considered traitors of Israel.

Along with them were sinners. Sinners were people who had failed to present the required sacrifices for atonement of sin according to the law. They were there in the crowds.

They sought out and followed Jesus because He was a different kind of Rabbi than all the other religious rulers in Israel. If the song had been written in their day it would have been their theme song.

All my life was full of sin when Jesus found me,
All my heart was full of misery and woe;

Jesus placed His strong and loving arms around me,
And He led me in the way I ought to go.

No one ever cared for me like Jesus,
There's no other friend so kind as He;
No one else could take the sin and darkness from
me-
O how much He cared for me!

Because Jesus cared for them He was willing to
hang around them, so they hung around Him.

Verse one gives us an observation. In verse two we
meet the third group who offer an objection.

II. AN OBJECTION – v. 2

Here are the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law.
They are the ones who are supposed to be the
protectors and providers of spiritual life in Israel,
the ones who are supposed to lead people into the
presence of God, yet by their actions and attitudes
they keep the very people who need God from God.
They are smug in their self-righteous piety.

The religious leaders looked on these tax collectors
and sinners with disdain and contempt. In their
opinion they had sordid reputations so had nothing
but disdain for them. They did everything possible
to avoid contact with them in order to keep from
becoming ceremonially defiled. They looked on
them and formed opinions about them. GUILTY.
VILE. UNREGENERATE. UNCLEAN.

It is easy to fall into the same trap of being
judgmental and form opinions about others.
We form an opinion about the person standing on
the corner holding a cardboard sign.
We form an opinion about the person walking into
Walmart yelling obscenities at their children.
We formed opinions about Tom Brady and his
involvement in deflating footballs.
We form opinions about politicians embroiled in

scandal.

We form opinions about people we hear about on
TV or read in the paper who are on trial or
convicted with murder, rape, addictions, or other
types of crimes or actions.

When we form opinions like that we aren't far from
being just like the Pharisees.

But it wasn't just the tax collectors and sinners that
they formed opinions. They had opinions about
Jesus. Their opinion was guilt by association. He
hung around them, so He must be just like them,
after all birds of a feather flock together.

Verse two says they murmured. The dictionary
defines it as a low, indistinct, continuous sound; a
mumbled complaint. It usually suggests angry or
discontented words. They complained under their
breath about Jesus.

We have made some general observations about
those in the crowd around Jesus including the
religious leaders who had formed some specific
opinions and objections.

Before we move on, I want to make one more
passing observation. The Pharisees complained
amongst themselves "This man welcomes (KJV
receives) sinners..." I want to say praise the Lord –
He received me! Praise the Lord that He welcomed
me. It's a word that means to receive favorably.
Jesus didn't just tolerate them, put up with them. He
was favorably inclined toward them and received
them. Be glad He welcomes you – in spite of what
you done, in spite of the opinions of others. They
may object, but then, it's not their decision. I think
there are people in our circle of influence who are
wondering, hoping that someone would receive
them. Let's tell them that Jesus welcomes them.

In the remainder of the chapter we see how Jesus
responded to the contempt of the religious leaders.
He tells a story with three parts, each part driving

home a very important point for all three groups. Along with the parable of the Good Samaritan, these are the most familiar of Jesus' parables.

III. AN ILLUSTRATION WITH IMPORTANCE – v. 3-32

In the first story we learn a lesson about man's waywardness.

A. Man's Waywardness – v. 3-7

A man had 100 sheep. We aren't told if he was the actual owner or someone hired to care for the sheep. One of the sheep ends up getting lost. We don't know if it was in a pen or if they were in some field. All we know is that one wandered off. Immediately the shepherd recognized two problems. The first problem relates to the sheep. He knows that sheep aren't the smartest animal on the planet and since it wandered off, it could get into serious trouble. Sheep are dumb animals. If they happen to roll into a small ditch and ends up on its back, it cannot turn itself over. Sheep are defenseless animals. I suppose the only defense mechanism they may have is to lure a predator to sleep by starting to count. Unattended this sheep was in danger. But here's another problem, it didn't even know it's lost.

The second problem is to himself. If the sheep belonged to him it would be a monetary loss if he couldn't recover the sheep. If the sheep belonged to someone else it was still a monetary loss to him because according to the law, the only acceptable reason not to pay for damages was if it could be proven that the sheep was eaten by a wild animal and there had to be proof. Otherwise he was responsible to reimburse the owner for the loss.

This explains why he would leave the other 99 sheep in search for just that one. We might think the odds are acceptable. After all it's only one sheep out of 100, but not in this culture and not to

this man. In His story, Jesus said that the man went out and diligently searched for that one lost sheep until he found it. When he did, he joyfully carried it on his shoulders. But notice it isn't where you would expect. He didn't take it back with the rest of the sheep, he carried it home and when he got home he invited all his friends to join in celebrating that his lost sheep had been found.

Jesus summed up this story by saying that if such celebration was thrown over finding a lost sheep, think about how much greater the joy will be in heaven when even just one sinner repents.

Did you catch the contrast? From verse 2 we see the indifference, even indignation that the religious leaders had for the sinners around Jesus and yet we also see that Jesus welcomed them. The religious leaders didn't care about their lost condition, but Jesus did and that's why He was around them. They neither shared His concern nor rejoiced in their conversion. They were hypocritical shepherds without an ounce of compassion for the lost sheep of Israel. But Jesus is saying those sinners mattered.

We matter to Him. Isaiah depicts with clarity our plight as he describes us as being just like straying sheep. We are all wanderers. We have taken a wayward path. We are hopelessly and helplessly lost, but Jesus, the Good Shepherd has come to seek and save the lost.

Matthew 9:36-38

We are the lost Jesus came to seek and to save by laying down His life for us. Jesus receives sinners and when even just one sinner repents of their waywardness there is great rejoicing in heaven.

Take hope today if you know of someone who is wayward, lost like a wandering sheep. Jesus is still seeking sinners, He is still receiving repentant sinners to bring them into the joy of heaven. Many people are like sheep and don't even know they are

lost. Jesus is waiting to welcome them and Jesus has left it to us to compassionately point the way to Jesus who alone can save. And if possible, to also show the self-righteous person their need of the Savior, the only one who can save.

Story one shows us man's waywardness. The religious leaders didn't think the sinners around Jesus were of any value, but Jesus showed them differently.

Story two shows us something else.

B. Man's Worthlessness – v. 8-10

In His second story, a woman has 10 coins. One day she finds that one is missing. The coin represented a day's wage. We surmise that this was part of her dowry. The dowry was the price paid by the groom or the groom's father to the father or brothers of the bride. It was then given to her and often made into jewelry like a head piece, necklace or bracelet. She would keep it so that in the event her husband died she would have some financial means to care for herself as a widow.

This woman lost one of those coins. It was of great value to her. As an inanimate object the coin had no choice in the matter. Sometimes when we lose our keys or the remote we wonder if the thing grew legs and wandered off, but no, it didn't. That this coin was lost came through the carelessness of the woman. It may have fallen out of its setting while she was working around the house. She may have been inattentive to carefully inspect that everything was secure.

But here's the thing, while the coin was of great value to her, it was of no value in its current lost state wherever it was in the house.

Isn't it interesting how artifacts that have been lost for centuries, buried in tons of dirt or submerged in

hundreds of feet of water have no value until they are found? They don't know they're lost, but all of a sudden they are of great value when found.

This coin might as well have been on the moon. It had no value while lost. But to the one who lost it, the coin was priceless. So Jesus said she lit a lamp and began a diligent search. The house never looked so clean. Maybe that's a way to get teens to clean their room. Tell them they were in their room and lost \$10 and it's theirs if they clean the room and find it.

She swept and moved furniture and dishes, checked in bowls, under the rug – she looked everywhere until she found it. Then she called all her neighbors for a celebration.

Again, Jesus summarized the story with the obvious conclusion. What seemed unimportant to the religious leaders was of great concern to Jesus. When one sinner repents, the angels in heaven rejoice. What man considers worthless, Jesus sees as great value and He seeks after them diligently.

The neighbor who laces his conversation with profanity

The classmate who dresses in Goethe

The company CEO on his fourth marriage and 5th fifth

The pregnant teenager

The drug addict

The cheating spouse

The abortionist

The cashier

The cable guy

They are of great value to Him.

You are of great value to Him.

Romans 5:8 tells us just how valuable. "...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

The Religious leaders looked at the crowd and saw them as worthless, but Jesus saw great value that

was worth seeking.

We conclude with what is the most well-known story, the story about the prodigal son. But it's not really a story about one son. It's the story about two sons, both of whom are prodigal. One is rebellious, the other is religious. Both have a strained relationship with the father. One is outwardly and openly displaying it, the other is inwardly harboring it. But the story isn't really about the prodigal. It's more about the father and the mercy and grace he exhibited. It's about the love he had for both his sons. Jesus skillfully uses this parable to reveal that those gathered around Him that day were represented in the two sons. In this parable we see man's willfulness.

C. Man's Willfulness – v. 11-32

Where the sheep was wayward because it didn't know any better and the coin was lost due to no fault of its own, both sons were lost due to their own willfulness. Whether covert or overt, their rebellion was from pride, self-will and deliberate choice. This parable ties it all together and offers hope, hope of reconciliation.

Let's consider first the heartless son. His request was "give me what I have coming to me. I can't wait, I want it now." That was how he approached his father and asked for his share of the estate. Maybe he was tired of living in the shadow of his goody two shoes brother. Maybe he didn't like all the strict rules imposed on him. Maybe he wanted to spread his wing and go out and sow his wild oats. Whatever it was the magnetic pull of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life had drawn his heart away. He was ready to get out of Dodge.

Now it was the right of the father to deny this request because he was still alive and the property was still his. But the father somehow knew that

whether the son received his inheritance or not, he was going to leave. It didn't take long for the son to load up a UHaul and drive away. Like George Bailey in the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*, he was going to "shake the dust from this crummy little town."

I'm not even sure he used a map, just put his back to his father and headed out to a faraway land. We read that once he arrived he engaged in foolish living. He lived it up. He had all the fun a person could think of. He had all the friends a person could want. It's like he checked his moral conscience at the door and did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted it.

And then a famine hit. It wasn't just a famine in the land. It was a famine in his life.

There was a drought of his finances.

There was a drought in his fun.

There was a drought in his friends.

Everything he had was gone.

Maybe for a fleeting moment he pondered returning home, but then his reasoning quickly evaporated because of the rejection he might receive for the way he left. He had burned all his bridges back home. He cut the apron strings and didn't even look back for a second. His good times had fallen on bad times and by the time the famine hit he had spent every dime. He was bankrupt. His friends abandoned him. He was one of the guys you see on the street corner holding a tattered carb board sign saying homeless, will work for food. But the famine was severe and most people were suffering from it. However, there was a pig farmer. He seemed to weather the storm and this vagabond went and latched on to him begging for a job, begging for food, begging for anything. Taking a job tending pigs was the lowest a Jew could stoop. But he was desperate. He had reached the pits. He was at rock bottom. Maybe you know what he's going through. Maybe you know someone just like

him, figuratively tending pigs.

Years ago I helped a pig farmer in the church I was at. He had 4 or 500 pigs. One day he needed to move the weaned pigs out into the barnyard with the rest of the pigs. When born, they stay in the farrowing house with the mother. Then they are weaned from the mother to the crib where they got a special diet. From the crib they are moved to the barnyard. When I got there to help, he handed me a hooded sweatshirt and told me to put it on. I did. We went into the crib building. It was a double decker crib – pigs below and pigs above. The pigs weighed about 80-90 pounds. You had to grab them by the hind leg and then pull them into your chest and carry them out to the barnyard. He had about 100 we had to move. Before we started he told me to put the hood on. I asked why. He said the pigs on top get a little excited and because the floor had openings – well, let's just say it's not pleasant.

I also helped him clean out the stalls in the barn. All the slop from the day before had to be squeegeed into a trough and then all that was pushed into a large holding tank.

It was dirty, smelly, hard work. The only difference between me and this guy in Jesus' story is that the farmer I worked with fed me well. This guy got nothing. He would look at the pigs eating and wish he could even eat just the pods they ate. Our text says that no one gave him anything.

He was destitute.

He was deprived.

He was despairing.

He began to think of home and all that his father's servants had. Now here's the thing. He didn't know if his father was still alive. He didn't even know the extent of the famine, but going home and facing his father was better than this. I think he thought of more than just the food given to the

servants. More importantly I think thought about the generosity of his father.

He reasoned that if he just went home and sought forgiveness maybe his father would hire him on.

He recognized his problem.

He reasoned a petition.

He requested a pardon.

If that were your son or daughter, how would you respond?

The father had been looking for him every day, waiting, hoping, longing, all the while with an unwavering love. As haggard as the son must have looked, the father knew it was him when he saw a lone figure walking down the road. He bolted out the door and met him, kissing and embracing him with affection that can only come from a loving, forgiving father. Before the son could finish his prepared speech, the father offered him more than he had envisioned or even had to begin with. They were signs of being a son, not the signs of a servant and to cap it off the father threw a lavish party in his honor to celebrate his return.

Someone has rightly said that "God is swift to forgive and eager to save."

The party was already going when the older son came in from the field. He heard the noise from the party and asked what was going on. He was told of the return of the younger brother and the father was throwing a party. He became angry and refused to go in. The father went out to invite him in, but again he refused. The father couldn't force his son to enter, but he kept urging the older son. God will never force us into His kingdom.

Notice that he was displaying the same selfish attitude as the younger brother.

I've done all this for you.

I've never treated you like he did.

You've never given me.

Maybe he felt resentment toward the younger son, because he too wanted to leave, maybe he felt trapped. I want to suggest that while the older son stayed home, he was mentally in a faraway land as well. A far away country begins in the heart. It was all about him.

Did you notice that in three stories the only one who didn't have joy was the older son? He would not forgive his brother for all the foolish living he assumed he committed and he would not forgive his father for welcoming him back. He couldn't express any joy over his brother because he had no real love for his father.

Jesus is illustrating that the religious leaders were just like the older son.

They thought their position as God's chosen was enough.

They thought their loyalty to God was enough.

They thought their obedience to the law was enough.

The religious leaders had the same attitude toward the sinners and tax collectors as the older brother had for the younger brother. They couldn't rejoice over a sinner repenting because they had no real love for the Father and hated the Father for receiving them into the kingdom, when they had openly rebelled all the while they (the religious leaders) had faithfully kept the law.

Jesus saw what they were and He saw how they got there. But He saw what they could become.

Whether openly rebellious or obviously religious we have willfully gone astray. Our sin has separated us from God and He is waiting for us, willing to receive us when we repent.

If it was the right thing to seek after the lost sheep and the lost coin and to welcome the willfully disobedient son, how much more to save a sinner who repents?

Jesus receives sinners.

He wanted those who had been criticized by the Pharisees to know that they could repent and be welcomed by Him.

He wanted the Pharisees to know that even though they were religious, they were just as far away, but if they repented could be welcomed by the Father and enter into the celebration.

Jesus was offering hope to each group, that no matter how lost a person might be, he or she can be found, that no matter how religious a person may be he or she still needs to repent, and when that happens there is great rejoicing in heaven.

He encourages us today to see people as He sees them, to see them through eyes of compassion, eyes of love, eyes of forgiveness. We need to see them as people Christ died to save the same as we were. Repentance is the cry of the Bible, without which there is no gospel.

Jesus receives sinners. Thank Him that He welcomed you and then pray for those you know and meet who need to experience the same joyful reception through repentance.