

Valley Bible Church – Parables of Jesus

What is God Like? He actively seeks the lost.

Introducing Your God: What is He like?

"This man receives sinners" (Luke 15:2)

Introduction

Lost: One Planet from *The Parables He Told* by David Redding,

"LOST: ONE PLANET with some people still on it. Man overboard in a sea of space and the man is Everyman. Lost: The Faith of our Fathers--in a bottomless pit of cold suspicion and very scholarly research. Lost: Late last night, I'm afraid, up the torturous streets of science, in the relativity of the times, somewhere in the mushrooming mountains of stacks at the library, in the desolate miles of file s . . . Lost: In the killing pace of progress, the runaway race for status. Lost: Carried out by the floodtide of pleasure, chased by the man-eating sharks inside himself, picked to pieces by analysis. Lost: Last seen somewhere east of Eden, a man whose name is Adam. Lost: His God, His Garden, His Way."

What do we do now? Is there anything written on the subject to help us understand? Yes! In fact Luke included three "lost" stories for us in chapter 15 of his Gospel alone.

Background

To fully understand this "story with a spiritual meaning" we need to see it as the trilogy it is. Looking at verse three and you will notice, *"He told them **this** parable."* It is like: a symphony with three movements, a play with three acts, a literary work in three volumes, or a Japanese screen with three panels. Each part is complete and beautiful, and meaningful, but the come together to tell the whole story.

All three episodes in this parable were told to deal with a single criticism of the actions of Jesus that made it impossible for many to accept Him as the messiah, the Chosen Son of God. (Read Luke 15:1 and 2).

1. The audience of this parable was a strange mix.

Publicans--hated Jews who signed up with Rome as tax collectors

Sinners--nor-religious Jews and perhaps some Gentiles

Pharisees--Orthodox Jews claiming to obey the letter of the Law

Scribes--copiers and experts in the interpretation of the Law

The accusation is, *"This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

The question is, How can a man, who is called Rabbi of Teacher, who is claimed by some to be that Messiah, have intimate relations with sinners?"

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Jesus answers: "Yes, I not only receive and eat with sinners, and outcasts, and rebels, and losers, . . . I ACTUALLY SEEK THEM OUT:

--Like a shepherd seeking a lost, wandering, foolish sheep

--Like a woman seeking a carelessly lost possession of value

--Like a father standing on a hill longing to see his son who ran off

I Actually Initiate the Search

This story has a message for people running away from God, or for runaway children who have wandered from God's family. But, more than that, it speaks to all of us. It asks us the question, "**Do I really understand the heart of God?**"

2. The key word in this parable is "lost."

Jesus never charges sin in the entire story. His word is lost. (This is the same word translated "perish" in John 3:16.) We like to call ourselves sinners because there seems to be some glamour to it. It identifies us as normal, one of the boys.

Think about it. Do we want to hear stories of people who were raised in good homes by righteous parents, turned to Jesus at an early age, and never rebelled except for swiping cookies from mom's cookie jar? I don't think so . . . boring! That doesn't make good press, live TV. or very exciting personal appearance material.

But, "Sin is what happens when we lose direction . . . No man wants to admit he's lost. It's unmanly, humiliating. A man will do anything to prove he's not a baby anymore."

Hasn't it become a defining trait of men that we will never stop to ask for directions and will wander around for hours rather than ask a stranger for help or admit we're lost?

Hillyer Stranton calls this a parable of four verbs: lost, seek, find, and rejoice.

3. The parable seems to indicate different types of lostness.

Lost stupid--Lost by lack of sense, and tendency to wander and follow

Lost passive--Lost by being manipulated or led astray by others

Lost deliberately--Lost by willful, rebellious decision

4. The focus is not on the lost, but on the heart of the father.

Picture 1: The good shepherd lays his life on the line to find the one lost sheep as if it was the only one he has.

Picture 2: The wise woman searches for her one lost coin as if it is the only coin she possesses.

Picture 3: The father is waiting, looking for his runaway son as if he is the only son he has.

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First View: The Caring Shepherd

A. Background

1. Shepherds were lower-class citizens.

They were, though they were necessary, considered unclean, boorish, and illiterate by the Pharisees.

2. Sheep are dumb, by nature.

They are senseless, careless, and prone to wander or follow blindly.

They don't even know when they are lost.

They are virtually defenseless, trusting, in need of supervision. BUT . . .

3. Sheep were of great value.

They were the sole means of support for a shepherd/family.

They provided much needed material: Food (1 Samuel 14:23), Milk (Isaiah 7:21,22), Wool (Job 31:20), Sacrifices (Leviticus 1:10)

B. Story (Read Luke 15:4-7)

1. Shepherd seeks one lost sheep (as if it is his only one)

Tending flock in rough hills he does a head count and misses one. He leaves the flock to go out and search for the lost one

2. How much did the shepherd want the lost sheep?

Enough to risk 99 valuable animals to find the lost one

Risking 1% for 99% is not good business (Shoplifting)

3. Why the risk all to seek just one?

Everyone belongs to the shepherd and each is valuable. He is personally involved with each one. He was involved in their birth and he raised them.

4. Punishment is forgotten in the joy of the moment.

He finds the lost sheep and rejoices.

C. The Parable Parallel

The shepherd seeking one sheep = God (Jesus) seeking one man.

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1. God seeks one lost man (as if he is His only one)

Man, given the opportunity will stray. *"All of us like sheep have gone astray"*-- Isaiah 53:6

God left heaven to *"seek and save that which was lost"*--Luke 19:10 *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"*--Luke 5:32

(This is one of the distinctive of Christianity, not man seeking God, but God seeking man.)

2. How much did God want the lost man?

Enough to seek him where he was and enough to die. *"But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* --Romans 5:8

3. Why did He seek one lost man?

Souls are not just ID numbers. Each is of infinite value. *"For what does it profit man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul."* --Mark 8:36

God is personally involved with each one, created/bought Lakeside amusement park story--Did I tell the father of 10, "Don't worry, you have 9 more at home?"

There are a number of lessons to be gleaned from this episode and several applications that can be made, but the

Big Point:

Men are lost and God loves each one enough to initiate the search, and enough to die to bring him into relationship with Himself.

Second View: The Concerned Woman

A. Background

1. Value of the coin (verse 8)

It was a Roman coin, a drachma, made of silver and worth less twenty cents in today's economy.

Then, however, it was worth a days wage for hard labor when little stood between people and starvation.

2. True value of the coin

It was one tenth of the woman's total net worth and could have been:

--Part of her temple tax, important for standing with God.

--More likely, part of a frontlet called a "semidi" which was a head band or necklace that demonstrated betrothal or marriage, much like a ring is today. That made it priceless.

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B. Story (Read Luke 15:8-10)

1. The woman searches for one lost coin (as if it is the only one)
2. There were no windows in most houses so she lights a lamp burning precious oil in order to look in every nook and cranny.
3. She sweeps the dirt floor slowly, carefully until she find it.
4. Searching is hard work, takes time, but the lost is valuable. When she finds it she shouts with joy to all who will listen.

C. The Parable Parallel

The woman searching for one coin = God searching for one man.

1. God seeks one man (as if he is His only one)

Preachers in the last centuries often referred to God as "the hound of heaven," staying on the scent until he captures the lost.

2. Man is lost in a dark world

And God sent His valuable light into the world to *"seek and save that which was lost."*

3. God sorts through the dirty world

He searches until He finds.

C. S. Lewis describes God's working in his life in his book, *Surprised By Joy*. (Tell the story) He says, "God dragged me kicking and screaming into the kingdom.

4. Finding a lost man is hard, in fact, it became a life and death struggle, but when the man is found there is a shout in heaven as the angel join in the party.

Again, there are a number of lessons from this episode to be learned and applied , but the

Big Point:

Some men are lost by their own foolishness, some by ignorance, but all are sought by God as if they were the only treasure missing.