

PARABLES IN LUKE

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Lesson 1

THE PARABLE OF THE SEARCHING FATHER

Luke 15:1-7

What does it mean to be lost? In our Christian circles, we talk about sinners being lost all the time, but do we understand what it means? For instance, when someone is lost in the woods for three days, we can say he is confused as to directions, a stranger to his environment, frustrated as to his very purpose for existence, separated from loved ones and tired, hungry and beat. A lost person's mind is occupied with survival and with the burning desire to be found and go home.

So it is with a lost person in a spiritual sense. A person outside of Jesus Christ is confused as to his real direction and purpose in life, for he does not know that there is more to life than physical and material pursuits. A lost person is a stranger to God and he is not operating in the spiritual environment for which he was originally created. A lost person is spiritually separated from God because of sin and is frustrated with life, having more questions than answers. Often people who are lost are tired of existence, hungry for reality and beat down by the cruel ways of life. The one goal of a person who is lost in the woods is to be found. He begins to seek any and every way to survive so he can be found and rescued. So it is with many a lost person spiritually. They begin to hunger for reality and search for the true meaning of life, and if they search diligently, they will find the meaning in the person of Jesus Christ and His work on the Cross.

Today we want to deal with a parable which tells us about what it is like to be spiritually lost and what it means to be spiritually found.

THE PARABLE OF THE SEARCHING FATHER or THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP (Luke 15:1-7)

The God of heaven and earth seeks after wayward sinners, causing them to seek Christ, and God rejoices when He finds them.

The purpose of this parable is to stress God's grace and the sinner's misery until he is found by God. It also stresses the divine side of salvation giving us a glimpse into God's heart attitude and activity in saving the lost. The emphasis of this parable is not on man's responsibility but upon God's work, although repentance is mentioned.

The characters are the "tax gatherers" and "sinners" who represent men who deserve nothing from God but judgment. God gives them a general call to believe and trust in Jesus and all who believe the gospel call shall be saved.

The "ninety-nine sheep" represent the Pharisees and scribes who were part of God's covenant in an external sense but were not truly saved. They were trusting their good works and had never truly repented.

The "man" represents God or Christ who is the Shepherd of His sheep and knows each one by name.

The “one sheep” represents one of God’s elect who has not yet been saved but God gives him a sovereign call to salvation.

This is a parable and we cannot make every detail fit. We must never force a parable; some aspects of a parable are left to interpretation and we dare not be dogmatic on that which is unclear.

THE SETTING (15:1, 2)

“Now all the tax gatherers and sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.”

-- Tax gatherers and sinners were interesting people. When we think of a tax gatherer in America, we think of someone who works for the Internal Revenue Service, but this was not the case in the days of our Lord. A tax gatherer in the Jewish society was a Jew who was hired by the Roman government to collect taxes from the Jews. These tax gatherers were guilty of overcharging and extortion. They exploited the people and were spies for the Romans. They bled the people dry for money and it is no wonder that the people hated them. In our society today they might be called loan sharks and finks. These tax gatherers were nothing but low-down crooks. We must remember that Matthew was a tax gatherer when Jesus called him to salvation and made him an Apostle. Matthew was a despicable person, but God saved him and he became a dynamo for Christ.

A sinner was an irreligious and nonpracticing Jew who was a social outcast. These were outcasts and outlaws in Israel. This would include the prostitutes, gamblers, thieves and bums. Today we might call these folks the hippies, dopers, and radicals. It was these types of people who were taking an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ; it was not the established religious people. The Jewish people, especially the Pharisees, who went to the temple and represented established religion, were not really interested in Jesus Christ. These sinners and tax gatherers were welcomed by Christ because He knew He could change their lives and make the unpleasant pleasant.

“And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’” – The self-righteous Pharisees and scribes, the religious men, the clergy of that day, did not mind if Christ talked to these outcasts, but Christ was asking them to eat with Him. The Pharisees were religious, pious and self-righteous, and they felt that to associate with this low class of people was great sin. They were self-righteous and religious. Their legalism made them “holier than thou” in their approach to people. The last thing a religious Pharisee or scribe would ever call himself is a sinner (and that was his major problem).

THE PARABLE (15:3-6)

“And He told them this parable, saying, ‘What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?’”-- The hundred sheep that is mentioned refers to the external community of Jews. They were the professors of the Jewish society. Some Jews were saved, but the great majority were lost. All Jews were part of the theocratic community (external, Jewish covenanted community), but most had no heart for God. The ninety-nine represents the mere professors in Judaism. Their tie to

God's covenant was only cultural, intellectual and religious, but they had no real commitment to God.

There are multitudes of people today who are in church and profess to be in God's covenant (professing Christian community), but they have no true reality of Christ. Only God knows the heart of man. They have the externals, but no real heart for God. Many of these folks in Christendom are in the same place as most Jews in the first century who were mere professors and not possessors of salvation.

The ninety-nine were professors and in the context it is referring to the religious Pharisees and scribes who had no real heart for God.

We are told that the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine and goes after one sheep who is lost. Christ left the religious people who felt they did not need repentance because of their self-righteousness and sought out people who knew they were sinners. The shepherd actively goes after the sheep until he finds it. Christ seeks the one who really feels he needs to be changed because he is a sinner. He sees he is lost, helpless and hopeless and turns to Jesus Christ.

The one sheep who is lost is an elect one of Christ not yet saved. We see God's compassion and concern for this sheep. He goes after him until He finds him. He does not leave the sheep alone until He finds it. God has His elect people from the eternal counsels. We do not know them, but God does. He will seek them, hunt them, stalk them and find them and save them, and they are truly going to come to repentance. God does not go after self-righteous people, but after people who know they are sinners.

The sheep was lost. What does it mean to be lost? A sinner is lost in that he is lost from God and not tied up with God and His plans. A sinner is lost in that he is not a part of the true flock of God – all true believers. He is also lost to himself in that he has not found the true meaning to life. If a lost sheep is not found, he will die and be destroyed. Sheep are dumb animals and no sheep really mean to get lost, but they do. They just wander from the flock until they just get far from the flock. When a sheep gets lost, he is running in circles, no purpose, no meaning. Men are lost because they are born in Adam but from a human standpoint a person becomes aware that he is lost. He wonders: "Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is my purpose in life?" He realizes he has no answers for life. God seeks a lost person who knows he is a sinner and wants the answers to life until He finds him. A sinner may struggle against God's call to salvation but he will be found because God never gives up until He finds His sheep.

"And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." – The shepherd seeks the sheep until he finds it and rejoices in his find. When God finds His elect sheep who is lost, He finds him frustrated, worn, weary and tired and puts him on His shoulders in tender, loving care and takes him home.

Christ found us; we did not find Christ. Christ has never been lost, but we are lost and He found us. He sought us out when we were struggling, frustrated and confused and He saved us. ***"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).*** God in sovereign grace seeks us out and saves us.

In my contacts with Christian people over the last eighteen years, I have found many people, sincere people, who feel they did God a favor when they became a Christian. They think that they came to God totally by their own actions. They feel there was something they did to commend themselves to God. Yet the Bible teaches just the opposite. The Bible tells us that we were nothing, we were lost, separated from God,

sinner, enemies of God, haters of God, under the curse of God and condemned. There was not one good thing in us, but God began to seek us out and put us under conviction of our sin, and one day we realized we were lost and in need of Christ. Yet, we would have never turned to Christ unless there was a previous work of God in drawing us and convicting us of sin. I personally am amazed at the number of people in Christian circles who really believe that they were the determining factor in their salvation. These people are truly saved but they are missing a dimension in their lives. They have never been overwhelmed and humbled by the infinite mercy, love and grace of a sovereign God, and they have never seen that behind their salvation was a God who found them worn, tired, frustrated and confused by sin. Their God, in tender, loving care, threw them over His shoulder, rescued them and took them home. Oh, the mighty grace of God!

“And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’” – The shepherd comes home with the sheep and Christ, our Shepherd, takes us home to be with Him in glory. Home for us as Christians is heaven, and we will forever be pilgrims and strangers on this earth until our God takes us home to heaven.

The shepherd rejoices with all his friends that he found the sheep. When God seeks us, finds us, and saves us, He does not keep this information to himself. God tells all the angels, all the elect of God, that He has saved another sinner by His infinite grace.

Notice the shepherd says he found his sheep (“my sheep”). A person is a sheep before he is saved even when he was a sinner. This sheep rightfully belongs to God because in the eternal counsels of God, God’s sheep are already saved. The world cannot have God’s sheep; the devil cannot have God’s sheep. God owns His own sheep because He has gone after them and bought them with the death of Christ. Those whom He sought with elective love shall be saved.

THE INTERPRETATION (15:7)

“I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”
-- This parable is all about the searching Father or the searching Christ, and the emphasis is upon God’s sovereign grace in moving into the life of an individual. Now Christ speaks of a sinner repenting. It is true that no man can repent except God’s grace enables him to do so, but this does not mean that man can be saved without repentance. Man must repent; man must believe; man must change his mind about God, Christ and sin or he will never be saved. It is repentance that brings joy in heaven! Repentance is absolutely necessary if a person is to be saved, and all who choose to repent shall be saved.

The ninety-nine righteous persons were the religious people, especially the Pharisees. They thought themselves good people and not sinners. After all, they prayed seven times a day and went to the temple three times a day; they kept the external law. They needed no repentance, they thought. They felt themselves all right in God’s sight because they were “do-gooders”.

And it happened that as He was reclining at table in the house, behold many tax gatherers and sinners came and joined Jesus and His disciples at the table. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His

disciples, 'Why does your Teacher eat with the tax gatherers and sinners?' but when He heard this, He said, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill. But go and learn what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SCARIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners''(Matthew 9:10-13).

“And hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners’” (Mark 2:17).

God is not going to effectually call good, moral, self-righteous people to salvation. He is not going to call people who think they are so good, holy and right that they do not need to repent. He is going to call people who know they are sinners, who know they are lost and have no hope in themselves. He is going to call those who see their sinfulness before a holy God. People may go to church, carry a Bible under their arm, say a few prayers and mumble some “god-words”, but they will not be saved until they see themselves sinners in need of a Saviour. God will save any self-righteous person, but not until they humble themselves and admit they are sinners in need of a Saviour.

CONCLUSION

Are you seeking for the meaning of life? Are you hungry for reality? If you are, has it occurred to you that God may be seeking you? Perhaps God has placed that seeking desire in you so that you will come to repentance. Perhaps God is causing you to seek that you might be found.

The moment you see yourself a sinner, under the wrath of God, totally unable to save yourself, and you turn to Christ to save you, you shall be saved. You must, however, repent; that is, you must change your mind about God, Christ and your sinful lifestyle and flee to Christ who longs to save sinners.

Are you lost? You can be found! How? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. To be saved actually means to be rescued. You can be rescued from sin, judgment and self when you come to Christ. When you do trust Christ, all heaven will rejoice in your decision. My friend, if you are lost, the way back home is through Jesus Christ.