

Luke Study 8 - Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son

Lk 15

Introduction

We all know the sense of relief we feel when we find something that we've lost: a wedding ring, a prized toy, a favourite keepsake. It's a great feeling.

That sense of relief is what we're meant to feel as we read Luke 15.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three stories about three things that are lost and found: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son.

But really he's talking about us: how we were lost in sin and death but how God found us. And how relieved we can feel about that, and how happy God is to have us back.

Let's get right into it.

Read Luke 15:1-2

1. Who is spending time with Jesus?
2. Why are they spending time with Jesus?
3. How do the Pharisees feel about that?

Jesus is spending time with the lowest of Israel's low: tax collectors and sinners. But they are gathering around to hear him: they want to hear his message. The Pharisees think this is appalling: Jesus shouldn't be spending time with such people. And so Jesus tells them a parable to correct them and tell them how they should really react when sinners come to hear him.

Read Luke 15:3-7

4. What does the shepherd do when he loses one of his sheep? (vv.3-6)
5. What comparison does Jesus draw between this and repentant sinners? (v.7)
6. What do you think Jesus means by 'righteous persons who do not need to repent?' Doesn't everyone need to repent?

Jesus makes a point he expects everyone to agree with: if you lose one of your sheep, you look for it - leaving the rest of your flock behind - and then rejoice when you find it. In the same way, Jesus says, there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent (not meaning that there are people who don't need to repent *at all*, but that there are people who don't *obviously* need to repent, i.e. 'good people.'). So, rather than disapprove of these

sinners when they come to hear Jesus, the Pharisees should rejoice at their repentance, as Jesus rejoices.

Jesus makes the same point in another story (though really it's the same story just told in a different way: 'parable' in v.3 is singular).

Read Luke 15:8-10

7. What does the woman do when she loses her coin? (vv.8-9)
8. What comparison does Jesus draw between this and repentant sinners? (v.10)
9. Who takes the initiative in both parts of this story in finding what's lost? What do you think this tells us about God?

Jesus makes the same point as in the first part of the parable: there is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents (and hence, the Pharisees should rejoice too).

In both parts of this parable, it is 'the finder' who takes the initiative: the shepherd has to look for his sheep and the woman has to look for her coin. The sheep and coin can't make their own way back to their owners: all they can do is wait to be found. There is something in here about salvation: God has to make the first move. Although sinners are responsible for coming back to God themselves, before they can do this, God must act in them first: he must 'look for' them. This is important to remember in any theology of salvation: although people must repent, they are powerless to do so until God acts. This must drive us to pray for our friends and family who have not yet started to 'gather around Jesus to hear him.'

But having stressed *God's side* of the process in sinners being found, Jesus now talks about the *human side* of being found, and our responsibility to return to God - but the wonderful and unexpected results when we do.

Read Luke 15:11-24

10. What does the younger son ask his father? What does he do then? (vv.11-13)
11. But then a crisis hits. How does the younger son respond? How does that work out for him? (vv.14-16)
12. What realisation does the younger son have? What does this make him do? (vv.17-20a)
13. How does his father react? (vv.20b-24)
14. Why do you think Jesus tells this story? What impact might it have on you?

Jesus tells a story about a son who asks his father for his share of the estate and then goes and squanders his money on 'wild living.' But when a famine hits, the son hits hard times: he's reduced to feeding pigs, and that for no pay! When he comes to his senses, he decides to return to his father, but not as his son: he will ask if he can be one of his servants. But the father will have none of it: before the son can even finish his pre-prepared speech, the father has wrapped him in a hug, covered him in kisses, put the finest clothes on him, and thrown a feast for him. Why? 'For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate.' (v.24)

The message is clear: God will welcome repentant sinners when they return to him. This is great news for the sinners gathered around Jesus, and for anyone who has ever turned away from God - which is all of us. If we return to him, he accept us.

But not everyone is happy about the father's response.

Read Luke 15:25-32

15. How does the older brother react to his younger brother's reception? (vv.25-28)
16. What does he say is so unfair about it? (vv.29-30)
17. What does this say about his own relationship with his father?
18. How does his father respond? (vv.31-32)
19. How does the story end?
20. Why do you think Jesus tells this story? What impact might it have on you?

The older brother - who has stayed at home and worked for his father the whole time his younger brother has been away - is furious at his father's response. The older brother has 'slaved for' his father all this time, but never even been given 'a goat' to go and celebrate with his friends. But now, his rebellious younger brother returns, and he's thrown a feast! How is that fair?

It's a point we may resonate with, until we see what's really going on for the older brother. On the one hand, he looks like the model son: he's stuck with his father when his brother abandoned him. But on the other hand, he's not really that different from his brother. He, too, sees his father as someone to get things from: a goat to celebrate with his friends, just as his brother asked for the inheritance. He, too, wants distance from his father: he wants the goat to celebrate *with his friends* - not his father - just as his younger brother ran away to a distant country. In other words, the brothers want the same thing from their father - distance and the means to achieve it - but just go about it different ways. The younger son does it by being bad; the older son does it by being good. But their intent is the same: they think the good life is one without their father, not with him. And that makes both brothers just as lost.

The difference Jesus points out is: we know how it ends up for the younger son. He accepts his father's forgiveness and joins the feast. But we don't know how it ends up for the older son: at the end of the parable, he's still standing outside, refusing to come in. Will he? We don't know. And that's Jesus' point. He's asking the Pharisees: the 'younger brothers' have come in (the tax collectors and sinners, listening to Jesus). Will you, the 'older brothers,' also come in? Will you stop trying to be good to get God off your back, and realise that the best life isn't one *free* from God, but *with* him? That life isn't about making sure you're not in God's debt, but accepting that you are and letting him pay for it? Letting him throw you a feast? That's the question Jesus asks the Pharisees. And it's the question he asks us too.

Will we join the feast? Or we will stay outside?