

Book	Psalms – Study 15
Topic	The Lost Sheep
Reference	Luke 15:1-10
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Today we have three parables:

- Lost sheep
- Lost coin
- Lost son / brother

Luke 15:1-7 (ESV) Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 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 that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Now let's look at the context. The context is that he tells the story in response to some grumbling. You see, tax collectors are sinners, were all coming near to Jesus and the Pharisees started grumbling. They don't want to listen to Jesus, the tax collectors and sinners won't listen to Jesus, but they grumble when the tax collector go to them. Why are you grumbling so much? So, this parable is in answer to that. How does Jesus answers? Well, we have to look into literary, cultural and historical settings of the parable and the need that prompted the parable.

Pharisees are completely different from tax collectors. The Romans will subcontract the collecting of taxes to the tax collectors. The tax collectors come and collect tax, but they will collect 50% more than the one they are supposed to collect. Because the 50% goes to his pocket. Some is 50%, some is 100%, some is 200%, depending on the likings. So people hate them. They are totally unscrupulous people, you will never vote for them. There is half a chance that you would probably murder them. They were the most horrible people on the face of the earth. These tax collectors were hated and the pharisees were only 7000 of them, they are the best of the best of the best. In terms of spirituality, they are the leaders. So they are holy people. They study the Bible, they follow the Bible and they are pure and holy. They were wondering why is Jesus mixing with these fellows.

So, if you look at the context, He uses sheep. Sheep are mentioned in the text because they are totally helpless and stupid. They are hopeless, cannot cooperate, totally dumb and is a picture of human beings. We are totally lost in sin and it fits our spiritual state.

So, let's look at the structure. So the main character is actually the shepherd. He is the one that takes all the action. He is proactive. He leaves the 99 sheep to find the one sheep, he takes risk at great length, he cares, he loves greatly and the same thing with the parable of the lost coin.

What is the difference between a coin and a sheep?

The similarity is that the coin is stupid too. The similarity is value. The value in the eyes of the shepherd and value in the eyes of the woman. She will run high and low, turn the whole house upside down just to find one silver coin. So, there is value involved. So now the main point is the relationship of the kingdom. Salvation is basically a divine initiative. When you want to get saved, you cannot do it on your own. That's what Jesus is trying to tell them. You cannot clean yourself up, you cannot follow Jesus home because you are a stupid sheep.

We have got religions that teach you how to live, teach you how to think but we must do the work. That's not possible. Jesus is telling you, in the kingdom of God you cannot do the work, you can't follow, you can't cooperate, you are totally helpless. The shepherd does everything. So therefore, Paul writes, the reason why this is so

Romans 5:12 (ESV) Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned

So just because Adam sinned, we actually bear cooperate guilt, inherited guilt, inherited corruption, so therefore just as one man sinned, one man's guilt passes on to us, you say not fair. If somebody puts your country into debt, then all of the countryman has to pay. This is called corporate responsibility. So as in Adam sin, he represented humanity. So therefore, we all bear the guilt. Not only we bear the guilt, we inherit the guilt nature. So that we also individually sin. Ephesians says that

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This means God initiates first. Therefore, faith will produce actual works but the first thing that this parable talks about is grace. The shepherd goes out to look for you. It is like sleeping beauty. Sleeping beauty is lying down there and she is dead. The

prince turns up, he kisses her by grace, and she resurrects and say basically my prince. That's how salvation is, you cannot save yourself, you are considered dead. Jesus comes, kisses you, brings you to life and then you have faith in Jesus Christ.

How grace creates community?

This man has 100 sheep, he lost one, he found the one, what happens is that he rejoices with great rejoicing. The woman has 10 coins, she loses one coin

Luke 15:6-7 (ESV) Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one **sinner who repents** than over **ninety-nine righteous** persons who need no repentance.

Luke 15:9-10 (ESV) And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, '**Rejoice** with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there **is joy** before the angels of God **over one sinner who repents.**"

There is an issue of joy and repentance. Now how does this apply to the fact that the pharisees are grumbling about the tax collectors. The pharisees are sour grapes and Jesus is spending time with the tax collector. Jesus is saying that you are the 99 sheep, you should be happy that I go and find the one that is lost. Because all of heaven is actually rejoicing. So actually, there is an inverted sense of value. Repentance is what God loves and human righteousness is what God hates. Now the 99 who are righteous, I don't think they are really righteous, they are lost but they don't know that they are lost.

The Libyan Liberation Rebel Group were asked the question of how they identify with

- 45% of front-line fighters chose their own battalion rather than their family
- 28% of non-fighters chose battalion over family. Interestingly,
- 1% of all participants were fused with ordinary Libyans who supported the revolution but did not join the battalions.

So basically, when you fight together with somebody side by side, that common experience actually fuses you together more closely than your actual family and that's what the experience of salvation is like. It is like fighting in the frontlines, you have a common experience and the common experience actually brings you closer.

Now the fundamental identity factors that give you joy but also builds barriers. For example, you were raised in a good family, gone to good university, have a good job and when you have all that automatically you will feel better than other people. Your own self-righteousness actually causes barriers, because you have a joy. Your joy is yourself, and this joy actually excludes other people. What we are talking about here is a gospel life and death experience and this experience is the same like everybody else and that actually includes everybody else and that's how the gospel

creates community. So therefore, the pharisees and the tax collectors, they know they are lost, the problem is that they don't actually know that they are lost.

Now let's go to the prodigal son. Everybody knows his story. Prodigal son is a parable, not a real story and it actually represents an assault on community. You have got the two brothers; the first brother comes out and he demands to share the inheritance. It is very unusual for a father to agree with such a condition. The expectation is if you take the money and you give him the inheritance, it means you wish your father die. Not only that, what do you think the whole neighborhood will be doing. They will be talking, you will be the news for the season. The problem is liquidation is difficult. All those days, they don't have banks, they don't have bonds, they don't have stocks, they don't have cash, they have silver or they have farms, cattle. For you to liquidate one third, your father has to sell the farm, you sell bits of it and then your livestock and all that. It is very-very difficult. It is actually threatening the livelihood of the entire family and the name and also family cohesion. By one son going out, the father is upset, the mother will be upset, the elder son will be even more upset due to the financial reasons.

There is crisis at the end of the story and when the prodigal son comes back, he gets upset. Instead of welcoming him back, he is actually very threatened, and he is the one that refuses family cohesion. So, the family unit is under assault both by the youngest son and the older son and they both have different manifestations of idolatry. The younger son is only interested in the father's things. That's why he wants one third. He wants to leave it to utilize it fully. There will come a crisis of control that he wants control. The second son is a picture of a crisis of control, he wants to spend the money, he is not interested in relationship with the father. He wishes his father dead. So, he is a nasty sort of a fellow. So, this is absolute crisis that he comes up with. The elder brother seems to be very quiet, always helping the father. He gets upset when the younger son comes back, and they killed the fatted calf. The fatted calf is a delicacy. This elder brother worked his whole life and the father never killed any fatted calf for him. He is also upset because the brother again has a share. It shows that he is only interested in the inheritance of his father's things. The one who left, he is behind but he actually never was interested in love. You see obedience is a means to things. He doesn't love to resemble the father, to be near to father, uphold his name, he humiliates the father because later in the party he never came. The father went out to talk to the son and that is humiliation. So, in front of everybody he actually disrespects his father. So, his obedience is a means to an end. So, the crisis brings up the motive.

If the younger son wouldn't have come back, we might have never known that the elder son is interested only in the father's money. With the arrival of crisis, it came up. So actually, this represents an assault of community on both of them.

Augustine of Hippo had two main problems, food and sex. He came to know Christ at a very much later date, but he always struggled with these two things. He struggled with beautiful woman and beautiful food and he actually wrote this,

Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally.

This is disordered love. That everything in life has to be placed in a hierarchy of order. All of us live and we want food, comfort, sex, to be useful, to be competent, affectionate, love and power. In Genesis chapter 3 the way God writes Genesis chapter 3 explains this to us, he gives us dominion which is power. He gives us the chance to work in the garden, which is food, comfort and competency. He gives wife, so we are relating to each other. So, there is love, affection and sex. These are all the things that actually God gives and actually if you see that correspondence in psychology.

In psychology you look at Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. In hierarchy, you always have to take care of your food, water, shelter. After that you are looking at your safety needs. After that you look after love and belonging. After that self-esteem, status and recognition. After that the desire to become the most that one be. So, there is a hierarchy of needs isn't it that all of us have. What Augustine is saying is that all these needs that are actually legitimate only if they are given to us in order to reflect God. So, in all the hierarchy of needs, they actually function to point us towards God and the moment you remove God out of the situation, it is like giving a sports car to the wife and the wife divorces you. It wasn't given for that particular interest.

The image of God informs us. The younger son is too addicted and too needy. The elder son is too angry and too selfish. They are the example of disordered love. The love of the father should be number one, then followed by other things. What they have done is that they have put other things first and that actually is a cause of the trouble. So, all we have to do is to look at repentance.

Now here is a crisis he spent everything already

Luke 15:14-17 (ESV) And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

This parable is an extreme example of really bad poverty. This word 'he came to himself' is a Hebrew idiom for repentance. If you look at the father's response

Luke 15:11-12 (ESV) And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

Actually, the words are very significant. A normal father wouldn't do this. This father actually gave the property. This word property here is 'Housia' which is property. The second word property is a mistranslation. The actual word is bios, which means life. Because in Ancient times, property is life. The whole farm is your life. It is not just liquidating one third and give to you, the father took his whole life to build that up and you are now tearing his life apart. That's very significant.

Father's Response

Luke 15:20 (ESV) And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

There is a response there. There is some fuse that actually detonates the father's compassion. Basically, it is repentance. There is nothing that detonates the love of God more than repentance. Lord Byron one the greatest British poets actually wrote that only the weak alone repent.

What is repentance so disempowered?

It is very disempowering because all of us believe that our power is our own ability in life. When you are repenting or saying sorry, you are saying that I am disconnected to my source of power. That's why nobody likes to say sorry, because we are disconnecting from our source of power. That's it, that's why we cannot repent. In fact Shakespeare writes,

I will repent and immediately for I might be out of heart shortly and I will have no strength to repent

This means Shakespeare actually believes it takes a lot of strength to repent. In order to actually repent you need to be full of joy, you need to be very much loved, you need to be spiritually strong and emotionally strong. So actually a person who can apologize easily actually owns a better thing. A person who cannot apologize is the one who has nothing more than that. That's what your life is about. That's the analogy.

Experience of liberation instead of disempowerment

- Who is free from pretense and evasion?

- Free from need to win every argument and to defend yourself
- Free from need to expose others as not so great or to lash back

So here he is suffering, and he wants to go back because of the hunger. Is this real repentance?

Luke 15:18-19 (ESV) I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

There is some repentance going on, but this is not full repentance. There are two kinds of repentance

2 Corinthians 7:10 (ESV) For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Regret/False repentance	Repentance
One focuses on yourself	Focus on the consequences relationship
Self-pity and self-absorption	Grieve because I am the cause of the break less focus on self
Legalistic conviction of sin based on God's justice ..fear punishment	Gospel conviction of sin arises from a sense of God's goodness...hate the sin changes self-centeredness
Self-atonement to get back record	A response to God's grace and love

In AD 1077 Emperor Henry which is the emperor from Germany refuses to help the pope and one day the pope Gregory the VII excommunicated him. This means cannot attend church service, cannot take communion and in those days, it is a big deal. So, what the emperor did was he actually walked all the way from Germany to Italy, in the middle of one of the worst winters ever and he was outside at the Castle of Canossa Italy with his guards, dressed in a very thin cloth. For three days, he banged the door, absolute deep winter but Pope Gregory ignored him completely. After three days, Pope Gregory let him come in. So that is the idea of repentance. The emperor suffered to make himself good again. That's actually not repentance.

19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

So, this is basically self-atonement, you want to earn your record back and you say, I am not good enough to be a Christian. When you hear someone, who says I am not good enough, it means that person doesn't understand the gospel. What this person is trying to do is to become good enough, so that he will be accepted. So here the prodigal son says, I am not good enough, I am not worthy, he is absolutely correct. He is not good enough but to come back as a hired servant means you are trying to earn your way back and how can you earn your way back.

God never looks at your record, because it will never be good enough. Basically, you punch yourself, you hurt yourself

I admit I am such a bad person and I curse myself that I am such a bad person because surely only a good person would be so honest and think himself so bad right? Beating myself up earns a good record

So when you actually atone for yourself, you beat yourself up, you make yourself very sad, what you are trying to do is you tell God is actually what I did was very bad, now I feel so bad about it. You are trying to earn a record and that doesn't work. Because when is it enough, when have you hurt yourself enough, when you have starved yourself enough, when have you beaten yourself enough, you can't. You can never earn yourself the way to heaven.

Some people use alcohol and drugs, try to hurt themselves because they don't feel good enough, they are trying to earn a good record again. Other people use religious activities, they attend church, go to Gamma, go to Bible study, give to charity to prove that I have what it takes to become a Christian. If you are doing that then you are actually trying to buy your way into heaven and that cannot happen because God looks at your righteous works and they are absolutely horrible. It is like this man coming back to his father and wanting to be a hired servant and earn back one third of the kingdom.

So, the father's response is grace and love. He ran and embraced him. Here he doesn't sit in his house and wait for the son to come in. He sees him far away, he loses his pride, the old man run to the son. He is actually humiliating himself as the old man don't run. The son said,

21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

Here there is no more hired servant here. You know why, because of the love of the father. When the father comes back, he wants you. He does not want your work, he wants you. You are the most precious person to him. You are the one sheep that is lost out of the 99. When that happens,

22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and **put a ring** on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

The ring is a signet ring. No wonder the elder son is angry. The younger brother got the power again to share the finances.

23 And bring the **fattened calf** and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate

True repentance is exactly the picture of sleeping beauty. Someone who died and then Jesus Christ comes and kisses and your response of the person who died is suddenly you die and then you woke up and you saw your prince and because he loved you, because he kissed you, because he brought you to life then you respond with love. It is an irresistible response. You cannot help yourself. True repentance is actually a response to beauty. When the love of Jesus Christ comes and you see how he loved you and how he did for you then you are not going to say, I am not worthy let me wait to attend Gamma or Alpha until the world nearly end then only, I am good enough to become. That will be an insult to God. You respond because of his love and you say, Oh God if you've died on the cross for me, I will give you my life. That is the proper response. So therefore, we are able to repent because we have got a true source of power. The source of power that allows you to live a Christian life. The source of power that lifts your heart every morning. That source of power is our Lord Jesus Christ. He pumps real power into you.

We tend to hide our sins from each other. Often when we come to church, we don't like to repent because we are all using our own power, but if you are actually depending on the power of Lord Jesus Christ, we will no longer be wearing masks. We will be able to admit failure. We will be able to not hide our sins and in fact Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was a Christian pastor, who was the leading evangelical light in the Nazi Germany at that time. He was hung a few days before the Americans took over. He wrote those words

"He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone," and this despite being together with others in worship, prayer and fellowship. Without confession as part of the practice of the community, its fellowship "permits no one to be a sinner... everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship." The result is people gathered together, yet living alone "in lies and hypocrisy"

These are real words. What he is saying is that, you can be together, but you are not repenting to one another and not exposing your sins to one another, you are then living a lie. If the power of Jesus Christ truly empowers you then you are able to let that go.

There was a movie some years ago called the Bridge on the River Kwai. If you remember the movie, what happened is that Japanese were very cruel. They used to torture people. Many-many Malaysians were actually taken up to River Kwai up that way on the death march and many of them died. One day they were doing an instrument check and one shovel was missing and the Japanese commander asked who stole this shovel. Nobody admitted. What he did, he said if nobody comes up, I will start killing people. Suddenly one man came up and he admitted it. Now before that the camp was a terrible place, people were starving, people will steal food from each other. There was no love, people were living like animals. But this man came up and he said, look I stole it. Immediately he took the shovel whacked the fellow and killed him. Later on, they found out that the shovel was not lost. The camp changed after that, people no longer fought like the end of the world. They no longer lived like animals. There was a certain decorum, certain respect, people started to sacrifice meals to other people, started to change. Why? Because one man gave up his life for them.

That's the story of Christianity. True repentance is seeing the new power in your life, the sacrifice of one person empowers you and empowers you to be able to repent.