

# Love the Lost

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Luke 15 verses 1 to 10. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Jesus, and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. So I told them this parable, what man of you having a hundred sheep if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it. And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbour saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. 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. Or what women having lost ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it. And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours saying, rejoice with me, for I have found a coin that I had lost. Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Amen. This is God's word. We give thanks for the freedom and the privilege of being able to read His word together. So, yeah, it could be said no better than the theme loving the lost, which is the theme for today. It probably can be said no better than starting with the words of Christ Himself at different places.

Well, not just the words of Christ, but the words of Scripture, which ultimately the words of Christ. We love because He first loved us, 1 John 4. Greater love is no man than this, that He lay down His one's life for His friends, John 15, 13. You see, just at the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly Romans 5, 8. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you killed the prophets and stoned those. I knew this quote would get me. How often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under his wings, but you're not willing? Jesus' words in Matthew 23. And these words and words like them remind us of our theme today, which is loving the lost returning. We're returning today to the lost chapter. I'm calling it the lost chapter. It's not really a lost chapter, but the theme is lostness, parable of lost sheep, lost coin, and the lost sun. Do remember that the parables, they're not allegories. They're not the same as allegories. Not everything in the parable represents something directly. So you don't look at every single little element in the parable and try and relate it to something spiritual. I don't think, for example, that nine coins that the lady looked for, the woman who looked for her lost coin, I don't think the nine coins actually represent anything particular. They're just part of the story.

And so we need to remember that. They're simple, they're illustrations to get across his teaching, his teaching in the context of the surrounding passages of Scripture. And really there's two main points, I think, in these two parables particularly, indeed or not, in the three of them, but we're not looking at the parable of the lost sun today. But in these two parables, there's two main points. And the first is, it gives us a look. They illustrate Jesus' heart, okay? And we'll see that from the context. And they challenge us to have a look at our own hearts. So it's that Jesus' heart is opened up and our hearts are opened up by these two parables, especially when it comes to our love for people who themselves don't know or love Jesus and who may even be enemies of Jesus in a very tangible way, in a very, maybe philosophical way or in their understanding of the universe.

I think what's very important to remember in these two parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin is that the lost sheep and the lost coin, they represent us all. They represent all of us. I don't think that these parables, and particularly not the first one about the lost sheep, I don't think that parable is primarily about Jesus speaking about reaching out to the marginalized per se. I think that's part of it, and we'll see that, the sinners because he's speaking into the context of the Pharisees' rejection of such people.

[ 5 : 0 0 ] But he is saying because it accords with the rest of Scripture that in God's eyes every single one of us without Christ in our lives is a lost sheep, the lost coin, a lost sheep.

We're lost without Christ. We're all sinners without Christ and lost sinners and condemned sinners without Jesus Christ. We're all tax collectors, cheats and traitors and prostitutes and homeless and addicts. Whatever maybe, whatever element of society is rejected by society is a recognition. We should recognize that we belong to that part of society because every human being that has ever lived since the very beginning are born rebels of the living God. We're all lost before the living God. Interestingly, the 99 sheep are spoken of by Jesus as representing something. The nine coins aren't, but the 99 sheep are. They represent those who don't feel the need to repent in 99. And that group of 99 represents those who either don't know they're lost or are believers, I believe, who are self-righteous and who look down on others who might have had a more colorful life than they have. I say believers and inverted commas. So the lost sheep and the lost coin represent us all. And I think that's important to recognize and it's important also to recognize the context into which Jesus gives these parables because He's wanting to expose who we love and who we don't love in our lives and what we think of ourselves, particularly when we claim to be believers, when we claim to know and love

Jesus Christ and what we think of Jesus Christ Himself. Because the Pharisees in this passage which we only really see a little bit from the beginning of the passage, the Pharisees got it wrong. And that's the context. The context is Jesus gives these parables in the context of the Pharisees looking down their noses at Jesus and at those with whom Jesus was fraternizing, the people that He was spending time with, the tax collectors and the sinners.

We're all drawing near to Jesus despite if you see the previous chapter. Jesus speaking about the cost of discipleship, the deep, deep cost of being disciples. Yet they still were drawn to the love and to the message and the person of Jesus. The Pharisees and the scribes, the religious leaders, they were looking down on them and on Jesus and this man received sinners and needs with them. So He told them this parable. So it's in that context that Jesus speak. First they were careless, they were self-centered, they thought more highly of themselves than they ought to have thought, especially as they could judge themselves against other people, the sinners and the tax collectors. Now I wonder if Jesus, when He told this parable of the shepherd and of the lost sheep, whether He was thinking of the Old Testament prophecy in Ezekiel, in Ezekiel which speaks about the religious leaders of the day being poor shepherds of the sheep. And the prophecy there says, because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than the flock.

[ 8 : 49 ] Therefore you shepherds hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says. I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. So here we have the, almost Jesus, reminding them of this prophecy of their bad leadership as religious leaders of the day. They were self-centered, they cared more about themselves and regarded themselves as holy, not like other people. You know, the prayer of the Pharisee who went up and said, Father, I thank you, I'm not like this wretched sinner here. I'm a good guy. And how Jesus just really hated that attitude. So they were careless at that level.

But they were also critical, weren't they? As religious leaders, they were critical of Jesus. This man received sinners and eats with him. They were critical of his message of his means of evangelism. They didn't like his social life. They didn't like the fact that he had friendships among those that were outcasts and who were rejects and who couldn't possibly belong to the living God. That's the context of looking at this passage about loving the lost.

Now where might we be tempted to be loveless? And as all preaching does, it comes from one zone experience. So when I speak about the possible temptations of where we might be loveless, it's because I know all about them in my own heart. We can be tempted to be blind to our own commonality with all of society. With every person we meet, whoever we rub shoulders with, isn't it so easy for us, even in the privacy of our own hearts or homes, to look down on or to reject others, especially those maybe who reject us or reject the Christ that we love. I'm not talking about loving one another this week, about the church, about Christians. We did that last week. So easy for us though to condemn and to judge those who don't believe, to forget who we are, to forget that we were lost and that Christ found us, to forget our ongoing heart on a daily basis, to forget grace, to be self-absorbed with our own decency, our own life, our own efforts, our own goodness, and it all revolves around ourselves. What was it He said, who cared not only for themselves rather than for my flock? And there's that reality of not having a care for those who need search for, those who are lost. To blind to our own commonality with humanity, blind and also critical sometimes of others who don't know Christ. The poor, maybe sometimes the disenfranchised, the homeless, the addicts.

Sometimes we join the chorus, don't we, of society and we keep our distance and say, well, it's probably their own fault that they've got to where they are. The immoral, the atheists, the secularists, we condemn them with nothing in common with them, we think. We sometimes even fight against them without much thought or prayer about their lives, their hearts, their vulnerabilities, their fears, their lostness, their questions, their search. We can be critical. But maybe on a completely different angle, looking at it from a different perspective, it's not that we judge, it's not that we condemn, it's not that we separate ourselves, it's not that we're careless about people's souls, it's that we don't feel any separation at all. We don't consider their lostness. We're happy basically to live by the same standards and the same values and the same friendships of everyone around us. Because possibly we're living without Christ ourselves. That's a temptation in our lives that we love people who are not Christians, which is a great thing.

But we simply love them in a kind of human way. We don't see them in their relationship or their estrangement from their Creator, their Father, their God, their lostness. And the judgment that they, as we were all under, the separation, the death, the judgment and the hell, it's unthinkable for us, unthinkable. So we don't think about it. And we don't think about them in that way. We love them, we socialize with them, we have great relationships with them, many maybe who are not Christians. But we never share our faith. We never tell them in love and gently and graciously in our own words, their need for Christ as our need for Christ is real. Because we're all in the same boat, aren't we? That's what Jesus is teaching us here about lostness. So that we're called then, these might be some of the temptations, you might have other temptations also. But we're called then to be imitators of Christ's love. There's a great verse, Ephesians 5, 1, it says, Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ's love does and gave himself up for his fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. So we're called there to imitate Jesus. We can't imitate Him by going to the cross, that's not what we're called to do. But we're called to imitate

His love because He gives us His love in Christ. We're indwelt by His love through the Holy Spirit. And we saw as, I think we saw maybe the last two weeks, that it's a very different kind of love to merely natural love. And we're to love those who aren't Christians and those who are lost and maybe those who are enemies of us sometimes because of our faith. We're to love them because that's how we were once. We were lost ourselves and we've been touched and saved by divine love. And that changes everything. So take time this morning, just for a few moments, not this morning, any time at some point today, just to consider that again, to consider what it means to be embraced and to be subsumed and to be covered and to be looked after by Christ's love. Maybe it's, particularly things have gone really easily for you in your life. Listen to those who have gone through deep difficulty and loss and sadness and trial and tribulation who are Christ's. And see how much Christ envelopes them at that time. See the peace that they enjoy. Unmistakably miraculous. Not when things are great, but when things are difficult and troublesome, where you think you'd be tempted to give up your faith. That's very often you will find the deepest expression of God's love in your life. And remember that, and if you're in a dark place today, if you're struggling, if you want to give up, if you're looking at other people, if you feel God isn't answering, please go back to be comforted and to sense your value and to know your healing in Jesus Christ. And that love which passes understanding, it's very difficult to explain. Sometimes a preacher is incredibly difficult because you can't explain. In the old Scottish terminology, better felt than tell. And that's true for us. And it must be true for you. And all of the testimonies, great reading these testimonies.

[16:34] Sorry, we're, Chloe and I are both feeling like the cat that got the cream. Because, and the elders, because we've read all these testimonies. But nearly all of these testimonies speak about the importance of many of them moving from a place of intellectual knowledge and being brought up in Christian homes. But then realizing it's much more than that. It's a heartfelt recognition of Christ in my life, in my heart, and my need personally for forgiveness and redemption. That's a different love. And we're called to live with that different love in our lives. And it's a love that enables us to have a significant presence in the world, significant presence. Look at the story. Jesus is very significant in the story. And also, as He's represented in the parables, the shepherd, the woman, they both play very important, significant roles in the parable. And He is significantly visible eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. And He is receiving them. There's a great significance in His presence in that context. And so I say in terms of loving the lost, just be there.

Just be there with them. You've got to be in it to win it. You've got to be there. You've got to be in their company. You've got to let them know that you're a real person. You've got to eat and drink

with them. You've got to be in that place where your presence is known. And your presence, remember, is the presence of God the Holy Spirit in you as well, your Christ's children in that context. So your significant presence is important.

We're not called to be isolationists. We're not called to be monastic. We are called to be in and among people to live that life and to share that life. And that's what we and what you must be, I hope, and pray in St. Columbus as you continue to be. And with that, then will be a love for the lost, a love for them, that you value them more than you value your own life, that you take time, that we take time to understand them, to understand their questions, to listen to them, to not just come and ram gospel truth down their throats whether they want it or not. Never works. Commit time to them. Show them that they're not a project, that you just love them for who they are. Love them as those who are made in God's image. Love them as God's estranged children. See beyond their outward rejection sometimes and rebellion. Take the initiative with them. Don't be afraid to be yourself among them. Be the first in St. Columbus to worship this visitor that comes in to the church as well. Be the one in your street or in your close or in your halls or whatever you happen to be who reaches out to those around you. Be the one who acts in love and shows acts of love to strangers. Develop long-term relationships with people who don't know and love Christ because you love them. And that's what we do when we love people. We make long-term relationships with them. Go to the office social when it's difficult and recognize that these things for us should become natural with His supernatural love in us, if that makes sense. You know what I mean? Because that's what Christ's appealing to here for the Pharisees. He's saying, He's not saying, I'm the shepherd and He's not saying I'm the woman in the parables. He's saying, what man, which one of you, He says, having a hundred sheep or the woman, you know, having ten silver coins if she loses one, doesn't light a lamp in front. He's saying, even to the Pharisees, this is what you should do. This is absolutely natural for a shepherd or for a woman who is poor and who's lost one of her ten coins that enables her to live. It's natural. It should for us as believers become natural to reach out. Christ's appealing a good shepherd naturally, a poor woman naturally, a loving father, naturally would do when faced with a lost sheep, a lost coin, or a lost son. And it should be our natural, spiritually natural, if I can use that mixed metaphor, really natural default position when we're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are becoming children of grace who love like Jesus loves and who eats and drinks with sinners. And that will take us out of our comfort zone. It will also take us into spiritual risk.

It always will take us into spiritual risk. It will take us to places of temptation. It will take us to a place where we're tempted to reject others. It will take us to a place where other Christians will criticize us for our fraternizing with the lost. That's why you need to go into these situations prayerfully and full of Jesus and full of His love and full of a right perspective. Because very often we can use our friendship with those who are not Christians as justification for living in a Godless way ourselves, can't we?

And that's not what I'm speaking about here. Because the recognition is that with Christ's love, there's a recognition for those whom we are befriending and loving and sharing our lives with that repentance is everything. Repentance for them is everything. Because it's the 99 who don't see their need of repentance that Jesus is speaking about. And he's saying implicitly, if not explicitly, that the returning lost sheep is the one who's repented and who is met with the Savior again. That gospel terminology is so important. That in seeing these friendships, we're seeing them from the perspective of a child of Christ who wants others to become children of Christ, children of the Father through His loving grace. I would have to preach my last sermon and mention C.S. Lewis. And I've probably quoted this many times here before from the weight of glory, very powerful sentence, quite long.

[ 23 : 38 ] It's a serious thing, he says, to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses to remember that the dullest, most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature, which if you saw now, you'd be strongly tempted to worship or else a horror and a corruption so as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all our friendships, all our loves, all our play, all our politics. There are no ordinary people. You've never talked to a mere mortal, nations, cultures, arts, civilizations. They're mortal and their life is two hours as the life of a nat, but as immortals that we joke with, work with and marry, snub and exploit, immortal horrors are everlasting splendors. That's someone who grasped the love of Christ and what it was to live in society and to recognize the need for repentance. And so in our friendships, we're recognizing that that's something important that through our friendships and through our trust and through our love with

the lost that we're able to tell them. Tell them about Christ, tell them about ourselves, tell them about our story, tell them and work through that and learn how to do that. It's not a formula, it's not a tick box, it's not a tick box. Don't do it in Bible speak. Don't necessarily tell someone you need to repent because they don't know what that means, but teach yourself to learn and I teach myself, we must teach ourselves to learn how to understand them so that they will understand what we want to share with them that is so important to us.

That's why Jesus so often spoke in parables. Pray in the Holy Spirit for them. Pray for the wisdom and the courage and the boldness just to be able to live in their company and when the opportunity reveals itself as we are living for Christ, then enable us to just share that with passion. I don't care if they're stumbling words. They don't care if they're stumbling words. They would rather that than some kind of silky smooth presentation that leaves them cold because it comes from the heart and because it's what we are and what we struggle with and try to be and why is it so important? Because as we saw before, this passage is also all about celebration. It's all about joy in heaven. Fix our eyes on Jesus, Hebrews 12 to the pioneer and perfecter of our faith for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, scorning at shame, sat down at the right hand of the Father. We're not told a lot about heaven's activities in the Bible, but we are slammed with it here in all of these parables. Jesus came from heaven and Jesus knows exactly what heaven's about and He knows that the focus of heaven and the activity of heaven is that it's a party of celebration for those who believe. It's a celebration when one sinner who depends comes into the kingdom. Jesus on the cross, in His resurrection, who does He take with Him? He takes with Him the criminal on the cross, the first to enter into glory as His first triumphant fruit of His labor. And if you do have time, I'll say, many of you I know will have heard this. You'll have seen it. And it's a clip from a pastor who, because

I'm at the front of the church, I've forgotten his name and he's really famous, but he speaks about this story, about the criminal on the cross who comes to you. What's his name?

Everyone knows it. Corey, you know who he is. It's a Scottish guy who's in America. Alsterbeg, that's it. Okay, he would have to be Scottish, even though he's in America. But honestly, it's one of the most powerful things you'll hear. And we shouldn't really record this, but as you're listening to that, look at the faces of the guys behind him, because I don't think they like what he's saying. And I think that's quite good, because it's an amazing passage. And do read it, if you can find it, I'll put it on the pastoral team's website, WhatsApp group. Joy it brings to heaven. Celebration. And if you're a believer, I'm sure you know that the greatest joy you've had, apart from your own coming to faith, is when someone you love, who you've prayed for, maybe you haven't witnessed to or you haven't known even terribly well, but when someone comes to faith, that is the greatest joy you experience. It puts everything into perspective. Whatever else happens in their lives, the greatest thing is they have come to know the Savior who has transformed your life and with whom you can hold hands on into eternity. That's what it's all about. And that's what it needs to be continually, as it will be, all about in since he's individually, since he's a congregation, and ourselves as individuals, aware of our need to keep stripping back, to have a focus on loving God, loving one another, loving the lost. That's a great focus, isn't it?

[ 29 : 48 ] And prayerful dependence. We don't know how to do it so often. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us and challenge us and keep us moving into that place of glorious grace and truth.

And when you do, you'll be more than okay. And the next Kingdom chapter here will be even better. Let's pray. Father God, we pray for your guidance and help. We pray for your Holy Spirit to teach us and lead us. We pray for many, many more celebratory times, instances in our church plants, in the Scottish church, and the worldwide church, many converts to Christ, many baptisms, many celebratory reflections of heaven. Remind us that that is what will enable us to taste heaven probably more than anything else will be when we sing and celebrate in the way that heaven sings and celebrates over those who come to know and come to faith in Jesus Christ. We pray for that. We think of the Palestinian, Israeli conflict and the need for a miraculous intervention on the ground. We've heard of many who have come to faith and been transformed among the Palestinians and the Jews, and we pray for more of that.

We pray for it in Iran and Iraq. We hear of many people who have come to know Christ through dreams that Christ has appeared to them in the difficulties and the dangers of professing Jesus in that environment. We pray for more of that. We pray for it in Pakistan and in India and in China and in places where the gospel is flourishing and many, many thousands of people are coming to Christ.

So what we pray for these countries of the world, we pray for ourselves. Help us not to think that the day of God's favour is past us. Help us to believe that there are many great things. I thank you for the 200 pastors that met in Falkirk this week, fasting and praying for Scotland and praying for the gospel. And we pray that that would bear fruit. And we ask and pray that we would see more of that in our day, that the churches would not be big enough to hold those who come to faith. That it would be a revival of your cause and of your kingdom. That the churches that are being emptied at the moment and being sold off or being united with lots of other churches and their spare buildings, that they would become new churches and new plants. And they would be filled with people worshipping you and reflecting heaven again. We rejoice in these things and we pray for them. And we ask that we would play a very small bit. We pray in our city a significant role along with all the other churches we love and we are in connection with in the city here, that we would see many, many people coming to know Jesus in His power and in the amazing reality of sharing that shepherd's love for the lost. So enable us to do it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.