

Introduction

I have something here that I'd like to show you. It's our church's "Lost and Found Box". Let's look at a few of the items in it: sunglasses, bracelet, ring, and etc. As different as these items are, they do have something in common. They're lost and need to be found. And you know what, so are many people. They're lost and need to be found and that's what I'm going to preach about today from Luke 15:1-10.

Two Parables

Verses 1 and 2 record that the Pharisees are at it again. They're criticizing Jesus. This time, it's because He's hanging around with tax collectors and sinners. So, he responds with two parables. In the first, verses 4-7, He tells about a man who loses and then finds one of his 100 sheep. In the second, verses 8-10, He tells about a woman who loses and then finds one of her ten silver coins.

Interpreting parables requires doing two things. First, identify their points of reference, their details that stand for something else. Second, determine what those points of reference stand for.

Let's do both of those things with these parables. The first points of reference are the owners of the sheep and coins. They stand for God. The second points of reference are the lost sheep and coin. They stand for unsaved people, non-Christians. The third and final points of reference are the lost sheep and coin being found. They stand for unsaved people getting saved – for non-Christians becoming Christians.

Those are the points of reference and what they stand for, which, together, teach us two things all of us need to know.

Lost

First, they teach us what it means for people to be lost. I used to hear that word, "**lost**," all the time when I was growing up. The people

in our little Friends Church were always talking about **"lost souls"**. That's how we describe non-Christians. Referring to this text and others, like Matthew 18:11, we say that they're **"lost"**. But what does that really mean? Let's look at these parables and find out. Notice two details.

One is that the lost sheep and coin weren't where they were supposed to be – in the pasture and the coin bag. And they weren't integrated into the lives of their owners as a result - weren't available to them. It's the same with the items in this box. The bracelet, for instance, isn't where it's supposed to be, in its owner's jewelry box. And it isn't integrated into her life as a result - isn't available to her.

Notice a second detail. Because the lost sheep and coin weren't integrated into their owners' lives, they were useless to them. The man couldn't shear his sheep or the woman spend her coin. It's the same with the lost bracelet. Because it isn't integrated into its owner's life, it's useless to her. She can't put it on to "dress up."

Those details teach us, by way of analogy, what it means for people to be lost. They're lost to God. They aren't where they're supposed to be, integrated into His life. They aren't available to Him. And they're useless to Him because they aren't. By **"useless to Him"**, I mean He can't enjoy them and can't use them to promote His purposes and will.

David Culbertson, for instance, was an Akron attorney and a typical non-Christian. By typical, I mean he was lost, not integrated into the life of God. He describes his non-Christian life this way: **"I didn't take God into account. I rarely thought about Him and never did anything for Him."** David, as a result, was useless to Him. God couldn't enjoy him or use him to promote His purposes and will.

David's testimony implies something about lostness that all of us need to know and tell. It's a condition not an outcome.

Few Christians grasp that. I heard an evangelist, for instance, say that people are lost because they're on the road to hell. People being lost is an outcome, in other words, and that outcome is hell.

But that's wrong. People aren't lost because they're going to hell.

They're going to hell because they're lost. People being lost is a condition, not being integrated into the life of God, that leads to an outcome, hell.

That means, and I quote Dallas Willard, "**Hell is not an 'oops' or a slip.**" It isn't a slight mistake on the part of the people who end up there. They end up there because their condition, not being integrated into the life of God, makes it not heaven the suitable place for them to be. People who don't take God into account would be more at home in hell than in heaven. That's why C.S. Lewis wrote what he did, "**The doors of hell are locked on the inside.**"

That then is the first thing these parables teach us – what it means for people to be lost. It means they aren't integrated into the life of God. That's a condition that leads to an outcome. It makes hell not heaven the suitable place for them to be.

Found

These parables teach us a second and happier thing – what it means for people to be found. The sheep and coin weren't just lost. They were eventually found as well. Notice two details about that.

First, the found sheep and coin are now where they're supposed to be - in the pasture and the coin bag. And they're integrated into the lives of their owners as a result - are available to them. It's the same with this bracelet if its owner finds it. It's where it's supposed to be, in her jewelry box. And it's integrated into her life as a result - is available to her.

Notice a second detail. Because the found sheep and coin are integrated into their owners' lives, they're useful to them. The man can now shear his sheep and the woman spend her coin. It's the same with the bracelet if its owner finds it. Because it's integrated into her life again, it's useful to her. She can put it on to "dress up."

Those two details teach us, by way of analogy, what it means for people to be found. They're where they're supposed to be, integrated

into the life of God. They're available to Him. And they're useful to Him because they are. By "**useful to Him**", I mean He can now enjoy them and use them to promote His purposes and will.

That's what happened to David Culbertson. He was found. On the way to a deposition one day, he was flipping through radio channels and for some reason began listening to a Baptist minister preaching. By the time he arrived at the deposition, the Holy Spirit had convicted him with such clarity and force that he knelt down and decided to follow Jesus.

And what a difference it made that he did. According to his own testimony, he now takes God routinely into account. God is the primary object of his thought and he does everything, including practicing law, for Him. David, as a result, is useful to Him. God enjoys him and uses him to promote His purposes and will.

David's testimony implies that what's true of being lost is true of being found as well. It's a condition that leads to an outcome. People aren't found because they're going to heaven. They're going to heaven because they're found.

That's a vital point because a lot of people think they can get into heaven by the skin of their teeth. I once talked with an elderly woman who does volunteer work. One of the reasons she does, she said, is "**to get enough points to get into heaven.**" She wasn't kidding. That's her point of view. It's sort of like Ohio's bar exam to become an attorney. It's a straight pass or fail test. Get 405 or more points out of 600 and you pass. Get 404 or less points and you fail. It's possible, therefore, to pass the bar exam by the skin of your teeth. That volunteer and many others think they can get into heaven the very same way. If they do enough good works to get enough points, they'll get in.

But it doesn't work that way. People never get into heaven by the skin of their teeth. They get into it because their condition, being integrated into the life of God, makes it not hell the suitable place for them to be. People like David, who take God habitually into account, would be perfectly at home in heaven and not at all at home in hell.

So that's the second thing these parables teach us – what it means for people to be found. It means that they are integrated into the life of God. That's a condition that leads to an outcome. It makes heaven not hell the suitable place for them to be.

Do a 180

So, be found. That's our call today. It's God of course who does the finding. It's His action that makes us found. But we must respond to that action of His, and Jesus tells us how in verse 10. Repent!

There's an idiom we use, "**Do a 180.**" Suppose Steve Bayer becomes a Pittsburgh Steelers fan or Sandy Mink never eats chocolate again. That's doing a 180. It connotes complete and opposite change. And that's what it means to repent. We do a 180. We change completely and oppositely in this way that I'm going to explain.

The Bible teaches that everyone is born with a sinful nature. And that the essence of that nature is self-centeredness. Listen to an excerpt from Sir Walter Scott's epic poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: "**Despite his titles, power, and pelf, the wretch concentered all in self; Living shall forfeit fair renown, and doubly dying, shall go down, To the vile dust from whence he sprung, unwept, unhonored, and unsung!**" Notice the line, "**the wretch concentered all in self.**" That describes all of us in our natural state apart from Jesus. Our defining quality is that we're concentered in self. God spoke of His selfhood to Moses by saying, "**I am.**" But we challenge that by asserting our selfhood and saying, "**I am.**" We make "self" (small "s") "Self" (capital "S"). You may think I'm being pessimistic. But I challenge you to do something. Observe how people normally think, feel, and act when their will is opposed. You'll see what they routinely do – assert "Self".

Several weeks ago, a check out clerk at Marc's made a mistake and had to get someone to correct it. The well-dressed woman in line in front of me became annoyed when she did and grumbled under her breath, "**This is ridiculous.**" She said that because she was in a hurry.

Her will was opposed, in other words, and she asserted "Self" when it was. She cried out, "**I am**," just as all people in their natural state, apart from Jesus, routinely do.

The problem is that you and I are not "**I am**." Our selfhood is derivative. God's is absolute. So, we repent, do a 180. We take "Self" off the throne of our lives and install God in its place. Or more simply put, we consent to the supremacy of His will in all things. We consent to that supremacy, as a practical matter, by doing two things.

First, we learn what His will is. His will is a matter of His commandments, what He tells us to do and not to do. He commands us, for instance, to be patient when people make mistakes like the checkout clerk did. His will is also a matter of His works, what He chooses to do and not to do in, through, and for us. He chooses, for instance, not to preserve our health and we get sick. But whether it's His commandments or works, we learn what His will is. We study Scripture and listen for the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, both of which I've explained before.

We consent to the supremacy of God's will by doing a second thing. We surrender our will to His. We may not like it and parts of us may resist it. Nevertheless, we are willing for God to be God. When it comes to His commandments, we intend to do what we know He wills. So, we make and carry out the decision to be patient when people make mistakes. We try or train to do it. When it comes to His works, we intend to act with them. So, we make and carry out the decision to bear our sickness with faith and grace. We try or train to do it.

Conclusion

I close with this food for thought. Suppose that we're on our deathbed with only hours to live. We'll be in one of two conditions when we are. We'll be lost like this bracelet is and suitable for hell. Or we'll be found like the sheep and coin were and suitable for heaven. So, repent! Do a 180! Learn what God's will is and surrender ours to His. We'll be found and suitable for heaven if we do.