



LUKE 15

Imagine going on a long plane ride. As you get up during the flight to go to the bathroom you see each person as you pass by in the aisle. There is a doctor, a crippled man, a boy and his dad. Oddly you see a man handcuffed to a beautiful girl. In the bathroom you muse over the people. Where are they coming from and where are they going? Suddenly you feel a jolt on the plane, a big jolt. Then in the blink of an eye you wake up on a beach alive. The Plane is everywhere and there are survivors like you wondering what just happened.

In time you begin to ask the questions: where are we, why did we survive, and how do we get off this island. I'm sure you get it now. You are in the TV show "Lost." Stranded on a mysterious island with no clue what is going on? The best part is you spend several seasons trying to find out those answers, but in the end you never really survived the plane crash in the first place, you died.

I can understand their feelings. At times I have felt lost. Why am I here? Where am I heading? How can I fix this mess? Being lost is like sitting down in a

movie half way through. Coming home and your family has disappeared. Getting off the freeway in Seattle and realizing you're in a risky neighborhood. Billy Graham said **“When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.”** **“Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves”** says David Henry Thoreau a famous American writer. How about: **“People take different roads seeking fulfillment and happiness. Just because they're not on your road doesn't mean they've gotten lost”** From H Jackson Brown Jr.

Being lost is no fun, but being found is great. I can't imagine the relief of being found if you were lost in the forest, desert, or on the sea.

In August some years ago, a 10m wooden Thai fishing boat, carrying 20 crew members, broke to pieces and sank in rough water. Most of the crew was forced overboard and where never seen again. Two men hung onto a large icebox, used to store fish, as the boat went down. They managed to climb into the icebox once it started floating, but there was no way for them to help any of the other crew members. It is believed that the icebox was hounded by 50 knot winds caused by cyclone Charlotte, and it was by pure luck that the icebox did not capsize in the extreme weather conditions. The weather was both a blessing and a curse though, as the men would never have made it without the monsoon rains, which provided them with fresh

drinking water almost daily. They floated like that, with only some old fish that was left in the bottom of the icebox, and the rainwater which the icebox caught, until the 17th of January. They were spotted, by pure luck, by a routine customs search plane, which radioed a rescue chopper. The picture was taken from the customs plane, and shows the two men desperately waving their shirts in the air, in hopes of being spotted. Following their rescue, they were taken to Thursday Island, where they were treated for severe dehydration, starvation and extreme sunburn. Once they had recovered, they were taken home to their surprised families.

In Ministry it's my business to know about what is called "The Lost." In Christian circles we talk about the Lost all the time. I bet if you asked most people in church they would say the Lost are people who don't believe in Jesus. They might be atheists who don't believe in God. Yet, if we were to dig a little deeper these people might say that the lost are out there: the people on the other side of the church walls. That got me thinking: are we really concerned about the lost? Who are they anyways? The other day I was discussing the question "are people saveable anymore"? Should we just leave them lost?

Starting this Sunday I am going to take us on a journey. We are going to discuss the state of the church. Is it healthy or is it lost? The theme of "the lost" is a great place to start when we begin to talk about the church. I have come up with a

list of 20 topics related to the modern church. Each theme is asking a question related to the lost. The reason I say “lost” is that we are connected to Jesus and when asked Jesus connected himself to “the lost.” Matthew 15:24 says **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** Luke 19:10 **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** John 17:12 states **“While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”**

Jesus is clear: he has come for the lost. That is the Gospel “the good news.” In church we are to proclaim the good news that Jesus has come to save the lost. So who are they? Well I believe they are the children of wrath I told you about last week in Ephesians 2: anyone outside of the kingdom. They are the people who don’t know or have rejected God. Inside the church that might be seen as anyone outside these walls. Those that choose to stay away from God and Christianity. Either way Jesus says his soul purpose is to find them and save them.

These themes I talk about are not like love, joy, and peace. Instead they are the tools we use to minister to people. They are the traditions we use to save the Lost. They are the traditions given to us by our for-fathers. My first theme or tool we use is the alter call. Why do we stand in here and ask for the unsaved to come forward? By tradition we do this act every so often with generally little results. I

have heard countless reports of pastors being dismayed because no one came forward. They preached an evangelistic message and nobody responded. Why? It might be because the “lost” are not in the house. Elvis has left the building. They are out there, not in here. So again I ask “why are we giving an alter call or a sermon to the saved”?

In fairness to church tradition ‘the alter’ is the place in the old testament where the people repented of their sins. It makes good sense that a church alter be that place. There is a need to have a place we can come to confess our sins like the Catholics do with a confession booth. The church is supposed to be in the “saving the lost business handed down by Jesus himself. Yet, the lost are not in church, Christians are. I call this the Alter problem.

To put all this together would you please turn in your Bibles to Luke 15. Today we are going to take the alter problem and see what Jesus recommends for the Lost. Luke 15 is a very popular and interesting chapter. It gives us three parables (or what we can call Jesus examples) about the subject “the Lost.” So without further ado, let’s get a little background to this chapter.

In chapter 14 we have Jesus discussing hospitality at a Pharisees house for dinner. When you go to grandma’s house for dinner, what happens? Family who only see each other two or three times a year catch up on what’s going on. At dinner you might talk about politics, the weather, or how bad uncle bob is or

something like that. Probably it's not the best thing to talk about hospitality at someone else's house. Yet, Jesus is not shy and he lays it on the line at this Pharisees house at dinner. He ended the discussion with a parable about a great banquet. The owner of the banquet only wanted people to come who wanted to be there. He was not begging for guests. Jesus then gives them a hint that those who want in for dinner are not prideful, or important, they are just ordinary people.

Remember Jesus was talking to the church rulers of the day. He was pointing out that the lost were not allowed into their homes. The synagogue was not a place for the common person. I believe Jesus was pointing out a question to the Pharisee "should the lost stay lost? So as we forward ourselves to chapter 15, Jesus is giving the crowds outside the Pharisees home three pictures of the state of the church. The first is the parable of the lost sheep. These stories come from Jesus culture. This would have resonated deeply with the people hearing it. It is by no mistake that Jesus waited until he was outside before he told these parables. I could see the Pharisees standing in their doorway while the crowds of sinners were gathering outside the yard: a perfect teaching moment.

I find these parables amazing. You can talk about them on so many different levels. When Jesus tells stories he is talking to several different people at once. In this first parable of the lost sheep he is talking to shepherds who are the low class; Pharisees who are upper class; what heaven is like; what God the father is like;

how much the lost person is valued; and what the church thinks about the lost. It's easy to say "don't dish on the church." That is taboo. Is it? Jesus slams the modern church of that day (the Pharisees) in these parables. How do I know, because there is tension between the church leaders and Jesus? Look at verse 1 and 2 of Luke 15.

"Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." See the Pharisees are choked and disgusted with Jesus spending time with those people "tax collectors and sinners", they are the lost."

So let's hear Jesus reply to their thoughts starting in verse 3 **"So he told them this parable: 4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and 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."** The point driven home in verse 7 is that there is no joy in the Pharisees house for those on the other side of the fence; they are not welcome or desired inside the house. This story was meant for the saints more than the sinner.

The Lost Sheep story says there are 100 things that mean something to you. Each sheep has been cared for, nurtured and protected. Why? Well for most of us it is to sell as food and clothing to make money. For others it's for the family to survive. It's not because we love sheep. They smell, they are noisy, and they tend to wander, because there sheep. Jesus is telling the people what they already know. Yet in this story Jesus says leave the bulk of the investment behind unprotected and find the missing one. This is a ridicules story. Who would leave the 7- 11 store open and unattended to find a missing loaf of bread or a candy bar? For most of us we would protect what we still have.

Jesus makes it even more ridicules by saying we would leave the 99 sheep in the wilderness and be gone "until" he finds the lost sheep. Now in our days and times it would be interesting if I went to my neighbors or asked my family to come over and celebrate the finding of my sheep. We don't spend time with the people living near us like they did in Jesus day. Probably the whole community would have known I had lost a sheep at that time. To a Shepard, one sheep is valuable. That is the point Jesus is making to the rulers of the church. The lost sinners outside the synagogue are valuable to God. They had forgotten that. They were so busy looking good and playing church, they forgot the heart of God.

Jesus reminds them in verse 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.” He is telling them Gods heart, but he is also revealing their hearts. Saved people in church don't need saving, they are not the lost. The alter call sometimes looks like a Pharisee. We act like were doing good calling people to repentance, yet the lost are not there and we know it. The goal of God is accomplished inside the church. Those people are saved. The real work of the church is to reach the goal of a saved soul, outside: that's where the lost are. We should be leaving the sheep inside and find the lost ones outside.

Now I know some will say Patrick the people inside need work. They are sheep and need tending. Yes they do, I agree, but when we put more emphasis on the found sheep and little on the lost ones, the lost stay lost. In church we have programs, preaching, and worship times. If were honest this church life is built and maintained for the “found” not the lost. Where are the disciple programs, outreach programs, and yearning for the lost. Jesus is saying in verse 7 that heaven aches, yearns, and is ecstatic over one lost soul that is found. The gospel message is really about the lost people finding a way back to God.” We “the body of Christ” are that way. Aren't we? Have we created a path for the Lost to follow to the Alter?

Jesus three parables cover many themes as I said but the message is clear to the Pharisees in Jesus day “How much effort are you using to find the lost”? Where is your heart for them? Are you interested in the tax collectors and sinners? Did you know that its tops on Gods heart. Why did Jesus come: to seek and save the lost.

Jesus then immediately tells them another parable. This message must have not sunk in. I bet he looked into their eyes and could see pride, hate, and disgust for him and the sinner. Imagine telling us your testimony and you can tell we are not at all interested. We are looking past you at someone else. Maybe we are yawning or we butt in and say “ya that’s cool but listen to mine.” Your story is personal. Your feelings reside deep in here. If I dish you like they did to Jesus. Imagine his hurt. He so desperately wanted them to get it. To get a heart for God and the lost people, yet they just saw two types of people them the saints and the sinners who aints.

So Jesus tries again with the parable of the lost coin. Verse **8 "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 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 in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."**

There is a lot going on in this short story. I mean it’s just three verses. Silver coins are valuable. They were then because the common coin was copper. Copper is as plentiful as fish. Silver on the other hand is precious. Don’t mistake that Jesus is using a precious metal to give meaning to the story. People are more precious than silver to the Lord. Jesus wants the crowd to know that. To lose one is devastating in heaven.

Let's read on. Look at the words describing the woman's search. She lights a lamp. She picks up the best tool she has to find the coin. It's not about lifting a few cushions or moving the milk to find something in the fridge. She takes the time to light the lamp and sweeps or searches the whole house to find the coin. Sweeping means to look diligently with force or one definition says drag the bottom of a river. That is perseverance. It then says she looked carefully, meaning to be thorough when looking.

Jesus then gives "the rejoice theme" again, calling friends and neighbors to celebrate the finding of her coin. He wants to point out again that finding the lost in heaven is a big deal. Is this story about finding the coin or is it that the Pharisees refusing to take any time to look at all? Listen to verse 10 again "**Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**"

There is so much in one verse. The Pharisees believed in angels. I bet that perked their ears. Jesus is talking to them directly by recognizing angels before God. He is also telling the church leaders that there is Joy before God when a sinner repents. I bet there was disgust and ridicule for the sinner in the synagogue and in the hearts of the men who tended it. Jesus is challenging them.

Jesus is also talking to the sinner. God loves them. He wants to save them. It's the same story: repent and God will accept you at home. The points in the first two

parables are simple. One is people are important to heaven. Two is that people are worth something to God, and three that “found” sinners because Gods house to rejoice.

The other side is that the Lost are not easily accepted in our churches. They weren't in Jesus day and even today we are no better. Why is the alter call in the church? Ok that's where the alter is, yet Jesus and John the Baptist called people to repent on their turf, not in the church or synagogue. We call for them in the church because then we don't have to go outside. It's like “because we asked”; we are free from guilt if nobody is saved. The guilt of not fulfilling the great commission: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** it said to go. This is always interesting; the Pharisees are always described as a little ways off of the crowds. It bugged them to get close to the Lost. Are you being honest with yourself “doesn't it bug you a little” to be with sinners?

Ok let's get on to the granddaddy in the bible: “The parable of the lost son.” I have probably heard more sermons on this story than any other. The pastor uses this as his greatest theme. It covers love, relationships, pride, lust, and family. It probably has several deep meanings. In a nutshell I feel it talks about getting what is due. We are an entitlement society these days. We feel we deserve our due.

One thing has been clear from the Alberta floods. People want their due. The government should buy our wrecked homes, the government should buy our land, the police should help, the natives are mad, the farmers are mad, and on and on we go. We are entitled. Yet responsibility for our actions like buying in flood plains, ignoring the reports, and only helping the worthy has set the tone in this flood. Good things have happened through this flood, but humanity has floated to the top in the rising waters as well.

The Parable of the lost son is Jesus stab at all of us. We want what we want. We are the son who wants his due. We are the parent willing to do anything for their kids. We are the ones who take for granted what we are given. We are the older son who wants his due, his justice, his recognition. This story is a part of each one of us. Yet it also tells a story about the alter call.

We call people to repent, but what are they repenting from: "life experiences." Isa 22:13 **"But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! "Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!"** As opposed to eat, drink, and get married, and then you die. We are who we are because of the life God has handed to us. We are born rich or born poor. We lose a love one or lose an arm. We hurt and we love. We are the sum of all our experiences.

Let's read the first few verses of this parable starting in verse 11 **"Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need."**

I believe with all my heart that the dad was right to let his son go. It says that after the son asked for his due. It took a few days. I bet the father had to think about it, pray about it, and get the money together. Yet the father did it. I might have told my son to jump in a lake. Yet when push comes to shove, I give my kids money.

The dad gave his son the best gift that day; life experience. Sure he went off and had a wing ding. He lived it up to the fullest. It was sin at its finest. The experience part came when life took over. He realized he was in need.

It's interesting the boy did not go home for more. Maybe it was pride, shame, or he was too far away. Let's read the next part" **So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were**

eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up 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 like one of your hired hands."

The biggest part of this parable is the pigs. Jesus knows it's a sin to eat pork in Jewish culture. That's what the others did, the ones that were on the outside: the Lost. Jesus drives his point deep by saying the boy desired pig food, he worked for free with pigs, and he was a slave to pig owners. This boy had not just blown it all, he was now a dirty low discussing pig loving sinner of the gentiles. These were the people the Pharisees hated and despised the most. Probably the boy was many of the sinners in the crowds around Jesus that day. It hit home for the saint and the sinner that day.

Let's keep going **"So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." 22 But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this**

son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

The father wasn't at home. He was far off from home maybe hoping his son would return. The boy had rehearsed an apology and tried to give it to his dad, but the dad was so overcome with joy. He interrupted his son and hugged him and gave him a royal welcome. Jesus is painting two pictures. Heaven will treat sinners like the dad did. But the Pharisees, the synagogue, the church of today treat the sinner like the older son. Let's read.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

In church we rejoice we are saved. We sing, we praise, and we judge the sermon. I knew a lady who tithed a percentage based on the sermon. If she liked it you got money. If she thought it stunk, you got squat. The older son is not content

with what he was given. He wanted recognition. He hated the sinner son for being lost. J Vernon McGee always says his wife criticizes him for getting ugly in his sermons. Deep down do you hate the Lost? Am I getting ugly with this? I know there strong words but do you go out and spend time with the lost as Jesus did all the time. Are you in the parties, in the streets, and at their houses, or are you in church hoping someone comes in your house and repents at your alter? I know a guy who went to a church outreach event. A lady told him. It's for the community but really it's for us, I hope not too many of them show up. It's the alter call problem.

I asked a pastor once if we could invite Airdrie to church. He said no because we don't have the means to serve them or minister to them. He was really saying I hope they don't all show up because this service is meant for us. In reality we should be like the father in Jesus parable. Verses 31-32

31 Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' "

The key is "this brother of yours." Jesus might be looking straight at the Pharisee. These people on the outside of your yard are brothers of yours. They are people just like you. Being Christian or Jewish is part of you, but you are still part of a bigger whole. Your still a person just like the sinner is. Most lost people don't

find a church because they don't know what church is? We are so busy as termites inside that we failed to see the crumbling society outside. They need us to become the saved. They would love to be saints instead of aints, if we were friendly, kind, compassionate, and interested in them as people. It's time that Christians take the alter call outside to where the sinners are. Be a place they could call home. Let's pray