



HG231: Parables And Possessions
The Parable Of The Lost Sheep & Lost Coin

Luke 15:1-10

Home Group Study Notes

7 November 2021 - Rachel Orford



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

We all lose things all the time. What lost thing would
you most like to find again?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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There are a few pastimes that are quintessentially British aren't there? Talking about the weather is one, then there is queuing and of course drinking tea. But I would like to add another to the list - losing things. Because I have noticed that we actually get quite competitive about it. "I'm ALWAYS losing things," we say. "I've lost my keys AGAIN." "I can NEVER find my phone...". And then there is actually getting lost too. How much do we rely on our sat navs now? Sometimes losing things is quite funny or at worst plain annoying, but I'm sure we can all remember heart stopping moments when we've lost something really valuable - a wallet, credit card, passport or your wedding ring and you break out in a cold sweat. Or being lost in the middle of nowhere when it's dark and feeling a bit disorientated and a bit panicky maybe.

It's this kind of "lostness" that Jesus is talking about in our two parables. Being really lost and not being able to find our way, or something going missing that is so valuable that to lose it would be life changing. The good news of course is that, in a spiritual sense, this actually doesn't ever have to happen. We are never so lost that we can't be found and no situation is so bad that it can't be redeemed, because of Jesus and the sacrifice he made. So who were these two parables for? Who was Jesus speaking to about this 'lostness'? A pretty random crowd of misfits were gathered around Jesus, identified as 'tax collectors and sinners'. Today we might be talking about loan sharks, rebels, even petty criminals, but also perhaps just ordinary people who thought they had messed up and the likelihood was that God wouldn't be interested in them. But the marvelous thing was that they were all sitting down listening to Jesus.

Who else was there? A group of people supremely confident in their own righteousness - the pharisees and the teachers of the law. And they weren't listening. They were having a grumble. They were always having a go about something - testing Jesus, accusing him of being blasphemous, working on the sabbath or interpreting the law incorrectly and even challenging him to show them signs from heaven. This time the particular item on their agenda was that he was associating with sinners.

Jesus was always with the common people and went out of his way to talk and meet with them. He didn't just preach to them. He spent time with them, ate with them and found out what they were all about. His disciples were just ordinary people and one of them, Matthew, was even a tax collector! He actively welcomed sinners precisely because they were lost. He gave us the reason in Mark 2:17. This was another occasion when the Pharisees caught him socialising with sinners and asked his disciples why he did it. Overhearing them Jesus told them "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Pharisees, as they so often did, had misunderstood Jesus, his motivations and the purpose of his ministry. So Jesus told these parables to illustrate God's attitude to sinners - people who were lost spiritually, whose spiritual sat nav had malfunctioned. They are short and simple parables; in each case something is lost, a search takes place after which it is found and then there is rejoicing. But as with all of Jesus parables they are carefully crafted to make you think. There are questions.

How do things get lost in the first place? Let's start with the sheep. Scripture often compares humans to sheep. Jesus himself identifies himself as the 'good shepherd' who will take care of us if we listen to his voice and even in the Old Testament there is practically a whole chapter from the prophet Ezekiel which he gives over to this sheep/humans analogy. In chapter 34 we hear the Lord saying "I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down.....I will search for the lost and bring back the strays".

I think we are often given the impression that sheep aren't very bright so that it's hardly surprising that they get lost. But maybe, like us, they are just easily distracted and prone to wandering. Because we all stray, lose contact with God and don't pay attention to him, Often we are unaware of where all this is leading, oblivious to the impending doom! It's not that we are particularly rebellious - just unaware.

But then I came across an article by a modern day shepherdess (yes, there are such people!), who also happens to follow Jesus. Unsurprisingly she didn't consider sheep to be stupid at all. One thing they do all have in common though is that their herding instinct is very strong and there would therefore need to be a very good reason why one had been separated from the rest of the flock, like an injury or illness which meant they could not keep up. In her opinion, a lone sheep is a stressed sheep. I'm sure we can identify times of stress, anxiety or despair, when it seems impossible to find our way back to God, when even prayer seems to be too much to contemplate. We too can become spiritually lost following some kind of crisis in our lives.

What about the lost coin? That shouldn't be so difficult should it? It's not been lost out in the open. It's at home, where we don't really expect things to become lost in the true sense - just misplaced. In fact we might not even bother looking for it because we know it's here somewhere. Sometimes we didn't even know it was missing. We just took it for granted that it was there.

Our faith can be a bit like that. We've been coming to church every week since - forever. We are familiar with the rhythm of the church year and we know the order things happen during the service. All seems well. But sometimes something might prompt us to look around and realise that maybe we aren't where we thought we were. Our prayers feel a bit empty or don't seem to be being answered. Other things have become more important and now we are just going through the motions. Surely we have a responsibility to keep a close eye on our relationship with God and check up on our faith, because sometimes, it's not where we thought it was, or it isn't there at all.

Of course Jesus was a skilled story teller and I'm sure that he had a whole load of parables up his sleeve which could have shown his listeners the many other ways in which things (and people) became lost. But we already have three - a lack of awareness, crisis and complacency.

What motivates the search? Why would anyone think of leaving behind 99 perfectly well behaved sheep and go to all the trouble of looking for the one who had decided not to follow the crowd? Why would you turn your house upside down to find one coin that in monetary terms wasn't actually worth very much? Jesus seems to take it for granted that you would doesn't he? He asks the rhetorical questions "does he not leave the ninety nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep....?" And "doesn't she not.....search carefully until she finds it?" Our answers would probably be "Er....No" to both those questions. If you had 100 sheep and only lost one you would think you hadn't done too badly wouldn't you? And you wouldn't bat an eyelid at losing a coin. You'd have a quick look under the sofa cushions and then get back to watching Strictly.

I think this is an instance where it would be useful to know a few things that would be obvious to the people listening to Jesus but not to us in our modern world. Even Jesus's crowd of misfits would know for example that a shepherd was unlikely to have 100 sheep which were all his own. He would either be working for someone else or maybe he was responsible for the sheep belonging to the whole village. This was his living. If he lost a sheep he would have his pay cut. Obviously there were good and bad shepherds so it would have been important for him to keep his good name in order to get work; losing sheep doesn't look good on a CV. As for leaving the 99, a large flock would be less vulnerable to predators than a sheep one its own; there was safety in numbers and the lone sheep was in far more danger. Also it is likely he would not have work alone with a flock this size and maybe one of his colleagues could have stayed with the other sheep in his absence. In the case of the lost coin, it might not have been worth a great deal in value, but the woman was likely to have a sentimental attachment to it because it would be part of her dowry. When a woman got married she took the money she had accumulated with her and the custom was to sew ten coins into her headdress to represent the contribution she had made to the marriage. In fact these coins could not be taken from her by law, even to pay a debt.

So Jesus' listeners would have understood the motivation to search for these things; they were of great value and it was worth sacrificing a bit of time and effort to find them. Jesus was trying to give them just an inkling of the kind of value God places on each of us. And notice how the woman carries out her search. First of all she lights a lamp. God knows that we cannot work in darkness and so he has given us his word to guide us. As Psalm 119 reminds us "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path". And he also gave us the ultimate gift in Jesus who identifies himself as "the light of the world" in John 8 we hear him say that "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Then she sweeps the floor. How many times have we heard testimonies from people who have turned to Jesus saying that they felt washed clean? If we want it, God has the power to sweep our lives clean, lay bear our circumstances so that we can be honest and see where our failings are. And then she searches carefully. She applies herself diligently to her task until the coin is found.

The people in the stories take the initiative in looking for their lost things. The shepherd doesn't just wait for the sheep to wander home. He leaves his comfort zone and goes into the open country. The woman doesn't just think the coin will turn up sooner or later. She has a good clear out. When humanity lost its way God didn't just shrug his shoulders and start creating another world of hopefully more obedient sheep. Instead, he crossed the great divide from heaven to earth to come and find us. In Jesus, he humbled himself to share our broken humanity. He became human and even underwent the agony of the cross to pay for our offences so that we could be found and reconciled to God.

At some point or other we are all part of that 10% or even 1% that are lost. But even if we were the only sinner in the world, God would still have come to search for us. He would still have made that sacrifice for us. His motivation is love.

What are we celebrating? We tend to reserve our biggest celebrations for the things that matter most to us - birthdays and anniversaries, graduations and promotions. In heaven it is the “sinner who repents,” which is valued enough to prompt this “rejoicing in the presence of angels.” A person who decides to change their life, to follow Jesus, to do their best for Christ. Someone who allows themselves to be found and therefore becomes eternally safe. Jesus’ joy at being able to bring us home, the salvation of humanity, meant that to him all the suffering and sacrifice was worthwhile.

This picture Jesus paints of the rejoicing and joy in heaven when we are found is a revelation to us about God’s heart for all of us. It can turn on its head any idea we might be harbouring of God as a serious, distant figure who simply commands respect and fear. Instead we find this slightly crazy, wonderfully caring shepherd who will stop at nothing to bring every single one of his sheep home or this dedicated, determined housewife turning her house upside down to find one lost possession.

We are all worth it So here are two simple stories with a simple, but powerful and life changing message. God’s heart is with the lost (which is all of us) and every single one of us is loved and important. We are all worth the trouble and sacrifice to him. We are the people sitting at the feet of Jesus in the story. We need to pay attention to what’s going on around us, to our journey with God and with our Christian brothers and sisters to make sure that we don’t get lost and that everyone else is keeping up too. Could we perhaps be more vigilant so that we can spot when others who were walking beside us are suddenly not there?

When bad things happen, we need to be proactive and reach out for help so that we don’t find ourselves isolated and disorientated. And it is surely important to find ways of keeping our faith alive and relevant and not to take our relationship with God for granted.

The one percent who become lost are not an abstraction. Each lost person has a name, an identity, and God has a plan for every one of them. They are the one percent that Jesus, in his great love, drops everything to seek out and save. They matter most to him precisely because they are lost and in danger. And we can tell what things matter most to us by how much we would be willing to sacrifice to make sure they are found. So it is worth thinking about what or who we are willing to go that extra mile for. Can it sometimes be our possessions? Our status and reputation? What about our children? Our families? Friends? People that we find hard to love? People who society habitually rejects? How important is it to us that they are all saved too?

We are after all now Jesus’s ambassadors on earth, his representatives - trainee shepherds and pains taking housewives. As Christians we should at least feel the same happiness when people come to Christ. I love the quote by CS Lewis that “joy is the serious business of heaven.” So we should make it our business too and perhaps it is time for us to get more serious about it. We are all worth it.



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Have you ever felt that you were so lost you couldn't be found? Are you able to share about it? (It's OK if you'd rather not). How does it feel to know that because of Jesus, you never actually need to feel like this?

2. What are some of the reasons you have strayed or lost contact with God? Lack of awareness? Crisis? Complacency? Something else?

3. Do you think you take your faith for granted? If you do, what are some ways you could keep a check on it in future? If you don't, perhaps you could share some advice on keeping it relevant and alive.

4. The shepherd left his comfort zone and went out searching for his sheep. What comfort zones do you have and what might staying within them prevent you from doing?

5. Who or what do you think you are willing to go that extra mile for? Do your actions bear this out?

6. We should all feel happiness when people come to Christ. Can you think of an occasion when this has been true for you?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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