

Calum Cameron: Luke 15 - Lost & Found

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] We're now, just for a few minutes, going to think about some of the stories that Jesus tells us in Luke chapter 15, which we read a few minutes ago. So if you have a Bible, you might want to have it open, Luke chapter 15. We'll have it on the screen throughout.

So in Luke chapter 15, Jesus tells us three short stories about things that are lost. Okay? He tells us about a shepherd that goes looking for his lost sheep.

He tells us about a woman that goes searching carefully for her lost coin. And he tells us about a father, a dad, who is looking out for his lost son. And I'm sure you guys know the feeling of having lost something.

I have some friends who I was staying with a few months ago who were looking after a dog called Clark. And Clark was an awesome dog in many ways. He was a lot of fun. He was well behaved. He was great to be around. But Clark had one big problem. Clark liked to run away. So if the door was left open for even a short amount of time and you turn your back, Clark is out the door in a flash.

[1 : 02] And when I was staying with these friends, he did that. He managed to get out. He got away. So we had to go out and look for him. So we had to get out on our bikes and we had to go around all the neighbours' gardens, through the woods, up and down the canal.

We spent hours looking for this dog. And we were getting more and more frustrated and exasperated and desperate. We could not find Clark anywhere.

And then eventually we find him safe and sound. He's oblivious that there's anything wrong. He's just a dog. But we've been on this long, desperate, hard search for him. And I'm sure you guys know the feeling of having lost something important and having gone on a big search for it.

And the Bible tells us here in Luke chapter 15 that God searches for lost people. God is a God who searches. So boys and girls, I want you to try and remember two things today, two key points from the Bible.

And the first one is this. God searches for lost people. Okay, God searches for lost people. This is what we see in Luke chapter 15.

[2 : 05] Jesus tells us three short stories which we call parables. Now the parables are really just simple stories from everyday life that Jesus would tell to make a point, to teach us something.

And before we look at these three parables, I just want to say one quick word about the context.

Now the context is something you'll probably hear Thomas speak about a lot. And really the context is just, it's asking questions like, who is Jesus speaking to here?

What is the setting for these stories? And the reason we ask these kind of questions is to help us understand the point that Jesus is making, to help us get our heads around what these stories are all about.

So when we look at the context and we look at the book of Luke that these stories are in, we see some examples of Jesus telling parables. In chapter 10, a man asked Jesus, who is my neighbour? And so Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan. We see the same thing in Luke chapter 12. Someone in the crowd says to Jesus, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

[3 : 11] Basically tell my brother to give me some money. His two brothers squabbling over a fortune. So Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool to make a point.

And again in Luke chapter 14, Jesus sees people taking the places of honour at the feast. He sees people taking the places of privilege for themselves.

So he tells the parable of the wedding feast. And we see that repeated again and again throughout Luke that something happens, a question is asked or some events happen that cause Jesus to tell a parable.

So we look here in Luke chapter 15, at these first two verses and we see the context. We need to understand that to understand what Jesus is saying through the stories. Verse one says, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. In other words, these religious leaders, the Pharisees and the scribes, they did not like the people Jesus was hanging out with.

[4 : 14] They did not like the company that Jesus was choosing. These tax collectors and sinners were people to be looked down on. They were like the dregs of Jewish society.

See tax collectors would collect money on commission from the Romans and give it to Rome. Now that wasn't the problem in and of itself. The problem with tax collectors was they would often lie and cheat and swindle to lie in their own pockets to make a profit.

So tax collectors were despised as the lowest of the low. And not only is Jesus teaching them here, but he's spending time with them. He's having food with them.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumble. They don't like the company that Jesus is choosing. So that's the context to these three parables, the attitude of the Pharisees and the scribes.

It's the reason Jesus goes on to tell these three stories about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. Now in these parables, Jesus is teaching us that God searches for the lost.

[5 : 23] The first story is about a shepherd who has a hundred sheep, but he goes off in search of that one missing animal. And he tells us a story about a woman who searches through her house diligently, carefully, for that one missing coin.

And then we have what is probably one of the most well-known stories in the whole Bible, the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus tells us about a man who had two sons, verse 11.

And the younger of them says to his father, give me the share of the property. Give me my inheritance now. And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country.

And there he squandered his property in reckless living. Verse 14 says, when he spent everything, a severe famine arose and he began to be in need. So he hires himself out.

He takes a job feeding pigs, utter humiliation for a Jewish person. And then 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.

[6 : 28] I will arise and go to my father. And I will say to him, father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. So he goes back to his father. He repents. And his father welcomes him back with open arms.

Each of these stories begins with something lost and ends with something found. And the key point in these stories is not that God is our shepherd. It's not that God is our father.

These are our great biblical truths. But the main point in these parables is that God seeks out sinners. God seeks out people who are lost.

Maybe that awkward, awkward, difficult person who is next to us or that person we find difficult at work is one of these lost sheep. Maybe one of you here today is the lost coin that God is searching for.

God is active in seeking out the lost. Jesus tells us in Luke chapter five, I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

[7 : 27] The Son of Man, he says when he's with Zacchaeus, came to seek and to save the lost. And if we think about the big picture of the Bible, but the Bible is all about, we see that this is a recurring theme.

God seeks out lost people. If we go all the way back to the beginning to Genesis and we think about what happened there. We think about creation, where Adam and Eve were created to live in harmony with God, in a right relationship with him.

And then they mess things up. They disobey God. There's the fall. Can you remember what God's first words are in Genesis chapter three?

Where are you? Where are you? His first words are not words of judgment. They're not words of wrath. We might expect that, but his first words are where are you?

God seeks out lost people. And as we go through the Bible, we see this whole theme of God's, what we call plan of redemption. God's plan to bring lost people back to himself.

[8 : 34] God wants to take people who are lost. He wants to bring them back into the fold like that lost sheep. God searches for the lost.

As we read these parables, I think we have to ask ourselves, well, who is Jesus speaking about here? Is he just referring to people like the prodigal son? Is he just speaking about people who go off and live a wildlife style?

Is he just speaking about people who are metaphorically in the mud with the pigs? Well, as I have 53 says that all of us like sheep have gone astray.

All of us have turned to our own way. Romans chapter three says there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who seeks God.

All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. The reality is that without the grace of God, we are all lost sinners.

[9 : 40] We all go our own ways frequently. We turn our back on God. But by his grace, God seeks out lost sinners like us.

There's a hymn called Amazing Grace. It was amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found.

I was blind, but now I see. So if you're a Christian today, if your faith and trust are in Christ, then you can say these words, I once was lost, but now I'm found.

So many people in our world are lost. We have people in our villages around us, in our workplaces, in our schools. Here we are, we are surrounded by people who are lost.

Jesus came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance. He came to seek and to save the lost. He might even be seeking you out this afternoon.

[10 : 45] So that's our first point. God searches for lost people. Our second point is that God rejoices when we are found. So boys and girls, try and remember these two things.

God searches for lost people and God rejoices when they are found. There's a huge contrast, a big difference in this chapter between the Pharisees and the scribes, the religious leaders, and they're grumbling and they're complaining with the joy and the delight of God our Father.

In verse five, after the shepherd finds his sheep, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours and he says to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents, as after the woman finds her lost coin. And again, when the prodigal son returns home, his father says 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.

Bring the fattened calf and kill it, let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found.

[12 : 07] So each of these stories, each of these parables end in the same way with God's joy, his absolute joy at having found the lost. Now, briefly, why does God rejoice when we are found?

Well, first of all, Luke 15 teaches us that God rejoices because of our repentance. Now, what does repentance mean? Well, we see it used in verse 7 and verse 10 that we more join heaven over one sinner who repents.

There is joy before the angels over one sinner who repents. So what does that word mean? Well, literally, the word that Luke uses for repent means to change your mind.

It means a different way of thinking. It means a U-turn, almost. So when you repent, you're saying before God, you're saying before other people, I was wrong.

God, you were right. This is a change of direction in your life. And this is what we see with the prodigal son. He's gone off his own way.

[13 : 13] He's taken with him his share of the family money and he's wasted away by partying and living wildly. So he ends up in a field feeding pigs, just the absolute picture of misery for a Jew.

But then in verse 17, we see the turning point. We see his repentance. He says, 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. I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. Father, I was wrong.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. See, repentance is not for people who think they have life sorted out.

Repentance is not for people who think they are perfect. Repentance is for those of us who recognize just how much we need God.

[14 : 15] Repentance is for people who come to their senses, who realize that we are in the mud with the pigs and things could be so much better.

And that kind of repentance, when we say to God, I was wrong. Father, I've sinned against you. It brings him incredible joy. You see, repentance is powerful evidence of God's grace in our lives. When we hold our hands up on we, we recognize that we were wrong, that we have sinned, that we need God's help.

Maybe today you feel like there's nothing you could do to please God. There's nothing you could possibly do to bring him happiness. But your repentance brings God unspeakable joy. Absolute joy. These parables teach us that one small, insignificant person means the world to God when they repent.

[15 : 14] There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 righteous people who need no repentance. So God rejoices because of our repentance.

Secondly another big word here, God rejoices because of our reconciliation. What does that mean? Well, really what it means is it's bringing back together two people who were apart.

If you think of having fallen out with someone, have you ever fallen out with someone? When we were up, I had two wee brothers, so we were fighting and falling out all the time. We would have week-long fights over who lost the TV remote or who broke the PlayStation.

We wouldn't speak to each other, we'd slam George and say, I'm never speaking to you again. But then after a wee while we would, we'd be friends again, we'd be reconciled, we'd be speaking to each other.

Another way of thinking about reconciliation is imagine finding something you thought was lost, something you thought you might never see again. Like when that dog, Clark, turned up, we were beginning to think, this dog's just, he's gone.

[16 : 16] But the feeling of joy we had when we found him. Frustration maybe, but joy was the key emotion that we felt. And the whole point of these parables is that if this man feels this much joy at having this one sheep back, if this woman feels this much joy at having her lost coin back, if this father feels this much joy at having his son back, how much more joy does God feel when a lost sinner repents, when he is reconciled with a lost person?

Now, briefly, how do we respond? What do we make of these parables? I think there's two characters in these stories that teach us something important about how we should respond.

First of all, the more obvious example I think is the younger son, the prodigal son, the one who was starving in the mud with the pigs. Some of us today have been there.

Maybe some of us today are there. Maybe we know that we are there. Maybe today is the day that we turn to God and we say, Father, I've sinned against heaven.

I've sinned against you. I'm not worthy to be called your son, and God will welcome you with open arms, with unmitigated joy.

[17 : 38] But the story doesn't end with the younger son repenting. It's interesting in the parable of the prodigal son, there is another brother.

There's the older son. We're told in verse 25, and I think he teaches us just as important a lesson. Verse 25 says, his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and he asked what these things meant. And he said to him, your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound. But the older brother was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and treated him, but he answered his father, look, these many years I have served you and I have never disobeyed your command. But you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, with wild living, you killed the fattened calf for him. And his father said to him, son, you are always with me.

[18 : 42] And all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.

See the older brother was not joyful at his younger brother's return. In fact, he's angry at how joyful his father is.

And I think this older brother gives us a sobering, almost frightening window into the hearts of the Pharisees and the Scribes, but I think also into our own hearts.

Do we share Jesus' compassion for the lost? Do we share Jesus' concern for those who are the dregs of society, the marginalised, the people that we might think are beyond help?

Do we expect to see these people in here? Do we expect to see lost people filling our pews? Or do we find ourselves a bit like the older brother?

[19 : 47] Do we grumble at the thought that Jesus might want to associate with people like that? Think about this, just as we close. What was the point of Jesus' ministry?

Was it to make us nicer? Was it to make us good and moral? Was it to make us feel great about ourselves as religious people?

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Darrell Bock has written a great commentary on the Book of Luke and he wrote this.

He says, Jesus provides us with a clear example to follow. Finding lost sheep and searching for missing coins should be a Christian's priority.

Jesus met with tax collectors and sinners. So should we. The reality today is that without God's grace, we are all lost sinners.

[20 : 48] Luke 15 is a wonderful reminder that God searches for lost people and he absolutely rejoices when we are found.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and now is found.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, our Father in heaven, we give you thanks for your incredible grace and mercy in seeking out lost sinners.

Lord, we recognise that each one of us have turned our backs on you. We have sinned. We have so often gone our own way. We pray today that we would be able to turn and we would say that we need you.

Father, we need your grace and mercy in our lives. Lord, we hold our hands up and we freely acknowledge how sinful we are. But Lord, we thank you that you are a God who seeks out sinners.

[21 : 56] You're a God who joyfully restores us. Lord, you have made it possible for us to be welcomed back as your children. Oh Lord, we give you thanks for all that you've done for us in the Gospel.

Lord, we thank you today for all the children that are with us and we pray Lord that you'd bless them as they grow up. We pray Lord that they would come to know Jesus Christ as their own saviour.

And Lord, we pray that you'd be with them in all that they do at school and as they look to the holidays Lord, we pray that you'd bless them.

So, Lord be with us as we continue to worship you in Jesus' name.