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## Lost and Found

Sometimes we can get worried that we have lost something, and we search and we search to find it, and even when we fail to find what we are searching for, it is then that we still have

that constant nagging feeling that if only we could think of where it was, or where we had put it, then we could find it.



The theme of something lost and the efforts we put to finding occur often in the Bible. In Luke's gospel, in the New Testament, both the story of the "lost sheep" and the story of the "lost coin" occur together at chapter 15.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is in Luke chapter 15, beginning at verse 3:

*<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

The Parable of the Lost Coin, Luke chapter 15, beginning at verse 8:

*<sup>8</sup> "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

The type of coin in the story was a very small coin, so in the story it was like losing a tiny 5p piece, and nothing more. To many people it would have been a sum so small that it was not worth searching for, let alone making any kind of celebration about having found such a small coin.

In the parables, neither the lost sheep nor the lost coin can do anything to get themselves found. The coin is inanimate and sheep do get stuck and get lost from time to time even though they are animate.

This causes us to realise that in the story that Jesus told us about one sheep that it seems to us that just one sheep is not really so important as the other 99 sheep. The 99 sheep

seem more important to most people hearing the story and yet the shepherd searched and searched for it.

If you think that is far fetched, then on television at the moment (2021) is a series about the life of a husband and wife, Shepherdess and Shepherd, called “**Our Yorkshire Farm**”, and filmed at Ravensat in a remote part of the Yorkshire Dales close to the border with Cumbria. They have a lot more than 100 sheep in their part of the Dales. It is a very large area of dale that they have and the effort they go to look after every single one of their sheep puts into perspective just how important and precious each sheep is to them. It is an attitude.

So it is quite realistic that a shepherd really would leave the 99 sheep to search for the one sheep that has got lost.

Please notice also that when the good shepherd finds his lost sheep, he doesn't drive it back into the fold making it walk ‘*under its own steam*’ but with infinite tenderness he carries it back. He lays it on his own shoulders rejoicing, staying with us all the time. When we are gone astray, and we are lost, God knows our weakness, that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves. He is gentle with us until by his grace we become stronger.

It is Jesus Christ who comes searching for us. God is the one who always knows where we are, is always with us and is waiting patiently for us to return to Him. We are the ones who are lost, and we are always the lost. Each time we come to God and thank Him for His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, we are found again and God and Jesus rejoices.

In Luke's Gospel the story of the lost sheep and the lost coin is followed by the Parable of the lost son. This story is often called the “Prodigal son”. This story now brings the meaning of these two earlier stories right back to what it means to real people. It is a very human story.

The Parable of the Lost Son is in Luke chapter 15, at verses 11 to 32

*<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.*

*<sup>13</sup> “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*<sup>17</sup> “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

*<sup>22</sup> “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

*<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’*

*<sup>28</sup> “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*

*<sup>31</sup> “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”*

There is a beautiful painting of the return of the prodigal son by Rembrandt in St Petersburg.

It is very beautiful but not quite right. It expresses well how important the return of the son was to the Father. Yet in Jesus Christ’s parable we are told that:

*<sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*



The Father portrayed in the picture does not look strong enough to run a long way to his son whilst he was still a long way off!

It was important that the Father ran to the son. The son had gone there in fear and trepidation because of how badly he had behaved, but the fact that his father ran to him

shows just how much joy was in the father's heart at seeing his son come back, regardless of what his youngest son had done.

The initial demand of the prodigal son is like going to your own parents and demanding all of your inheritance right now as if your parents had died (and effectively you telling them they are worthless). It is both as strong, and as offensive, as that. What this shows us is that eventually the younger son had come to his senses and returned, his father is so overjoyed by his return and wants to celebrate clearly, so clearly, that everything his younger son did is put in the past and completely discarded as a meaningless past event.

His eldest son had behaved properly throughout this time with his Father and yet it is the youngest son who has been completely forgiven for everything.

On the one hand this is real and total forgiveness of the kind that God gives us due to the selfless act of our Lord Jesus Christ, an act for which none of us are worthy. It is the kind of forgiveness that we can only dream about, yet in truth that forgiveness is available to us through the saving acts of Jesus Christ, but it is really hard for us both to understand and even accept. Real humanity is shown in the acts of every member of this family.

The humanity of this story is revealed equally in the response of the elder brother. It is difficult not to sympathise with the elder brother. The elder brother had never behaved so badly as to demand his inheritance as if his parents were dead and worthless – and yet “what is his reward?” It is very difficult not to sympathise with the elder brother.

This now brings home the real meaning in the earlier two stories when Jesus Christ tells us: *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*”

This also reveals through our understanding of how hurt the elder son felt that we are also not the perfect people that we would like to be, we are simply human as well.

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