



“Lostness”
Luke 15

Idea: Jesus welcomes and celebrates sinners who repent and turn to Him.

Intro: C.S. Lewis once said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” We are grateful that such a joyful place awaits believers. Let’s, however, not wait for heaven to be about the business of joy. I believe when a person gathers with and among the church, whether a Christian or a sinner, he or she should experience a love that produces joy. Such was the case for a young boy who used to walk several miles to attend a Sunday School that D.L. Moody was directing in Chicago. One day a person asked the boy why he did not try to find a Sunday School that was closer to his home. His reply was simple. He said, “Because they love a feller over there.”

I believe this boy’s experience was similar to that of the tax collectors and sinners in Jesus’ day. The Lord loved them, and they knew it. He sought them out and spent time hearing their stories and sharing meals with them. One of the most amazing things about Jesus’ love for sinners and how He conveyed it was that He never relaxed His standard of holiness. We would be tempted to do that today. In our age of tolerance, we dare not be guilty of offending people. Shane Pruitt serves as the National Next Gen Director for NAMB. He made an interesting observation last week. He said, “Jesus did not spend time and eat with sinners because He wanted to appear tolerant and affirming. He spent time with them to show them He is God and how to live differently. The gospel is not about affirmation but transformation.”

As we move into Luke 15, Jesus offers three parables to answer the accusation of the Pharisees and scribes who were offended by His behavior. It was one thing that Jesus welcomed tax collectors and sinners, but He went so far as to eat with them. In the three parables Jesus shares, spiritual lostness is on display. The religious leaders who grumbled over His actions did not understand that Jesus’ mission was *“to seek and save the lost”* (Luke 19:10). They also failed to realize that they too were among the lost.

[Read Luke 15.](#)

Inquiry: This great chapter teaches us that Jesus welcomes and celebrates sinners who repent and turn to Him. The Pharisees and scribes could not fathom why any well-meaning, respectable Jew would ever eat with a tax collector or sinner. Tax collectors were despised throughout the Roman Empire. Cicero, the Roman statesman and philosopher, insulted an opponent one time by saying that he must have imagined himself a tax collector, “since you most thievishly ransacked every man’s house, the warehouses, and the ships, entangled men engaged in business with the most unjust decrees, terrified the merchants as they landed, and delayed their embarkation.” In Jewish culture, the tax collectors were hated because they were turncoat Jews who had sold their souls to buy Roman tax-gathering franchises to prey on their fellow Jews. They were loathed in every way. Synagogues would not accept their offerings. Their testimony was not received in court. They were regarded as worse than

the heathen. As such, Jewish people believed they and the sinners (immoral) were in desperate need of redemption. In actuality, they probably believed them to be beyond the reach of redemption.

The Bible explains that ever since that rebellious day in Eden men, women, boys, and girls have worked to cover their shame and hidden themselves from God. Like Adam and Eve, they believe they know better than God. They think the road they are traveling is the right one. The reality, however, is the road they travel is a dead-end, and they are lost. The road leads to a wasteland full of destruction. Thankfully, here is where grace steps toward them. Rather than leaving sinners on such a dangerous road, Jesus offers a better path that is full of life and goodness. He is the One who goes after the lost until he or she is found. He is the One who waits in eager anticipation of the lost one's return. Then when the lost is found, He throws a grand party to celebrate the joy over a sinner who repents.

I want you to see five things about lostness from Luke 15.

1. The Depravity of Sin (vs. 13-16)

In the third parable, commonly referred to as The Parable of the Prodigal Son, the love of a father is portrayed. Unlike the shepherd and the woman in the first two parables, the father does not go out to seek the son, but it is the memory of the father's goodness that brings the son to repentance and forgiveness. The son has asked his father for his inheritance. He did not want to wait to receive it after his father's death. Instead, he wanted it now. The father agreed to give both of his sons their inheritances. Soon after, the younger son moved away and wasted all of it in "*reckless living.*"

Now, without money, the young man's situation worsens. A famine hits the land. Food and work become scarce. The only work he can find is at a pig farm, feeding pigs (sloping hogs). It is not a kosher place for a Jewish man. On top of that, apparently, he was not being paid enough to feed himself, so the young man longed to eat what the pigs were eating. His situation was desperate. His life hung in the balance.

This young man was lost. The depravity or corruption of sin in his life had taken him to places he had never imagined. It has been said that sin will take you further than you want to go and keep you longer than you want to stay. Such was the case for this young man. The depravity of sin had taken him to "*a far country.*" He was not where he was supposed to be. Many times, the "*far country*" has nothing to do with distance. It begins with the attitude of your heart. This son was lost because of his willful rebellion against his father. He decided to leave for what he believed to be better. This delusion is what sin always offers. Sin promises freedom, but it only delivers slavery. It promises success, but it brings failure. It promises life, but it can only produce death. The young man thought by chasing the dream, he would find himself. Instead, he only lost himself. The depravity of sin is a downward spiral of lostness.

2. The Grace of Consequences (vs. 17-19)

The consequences of this man's sinful choices were abysmal. Literally, he found himself wallowing in a pig pen. It is at this lowest of lows that "*he came to himself.*" His eyes were opened to the reality of his dire situation. He recognized his sinful choices and the consequences they had brought.

Theologically, we know "*the wages of sin is death*" (Rom 6:23). This death is both spiritual and physical. Spiritually, sin cuts us off from God. Physically, sin brings deadly things into our lives. Thankfully, there is more to that great verse in Romans. Paul goes on to say, "*but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" You see, while it is true that sin brings death, it is equally true that God desires to give life to the dead. Therefore, God graciously uses the consequences of our sin to

bring us to Himself. He will allow and even cause sinners to smack their noses against the floor of their sinful choices so that they might come to themselves and repent.

This young man did just that. He repented. Now, his change of mind was not driven entirely by his miserable state but also by his unrelenting memories of home. He remembered his father's goodness even toward the servants. So, he longed to return and simply enjoy the goodness that the servants experienced. The consequences of sinful choices are part of God's good grace to open our eyes to the reality of the depravity of sin.

3. The Love of the Savior (vs. 20-24)

While the young son is in the far country, the father in the story longingly waits for him to return. We are led to believe that this father often scanned the horizon, hoping to see his son coming home. One day, his deepest longing was satisfied as he recognized the distant figure coming down the road. It was the lost son, so the father ran to meet him. Out of compassion and love for the son, he hugged and kissed him. Even before there was confession of the wrongs done by the son, the father embraced him.

The love of the Savior longs to welcome sinners home. While the sinner is happy to simply be a servant in the Kingdom, the Savior only welcomes sons and daughters. In love, He places a ring on the finger, a robe over the shoulders, and shoes on the feet. He lovingly bestows sonship on the sinner and celebrates the return.

Church, do you see the love of the Savior? Sinners who are far from God, do you see the love of the Savior? Our God longs to welcome lost sinners home. Unfortunately, not everyone can see this love.

4. The Danger of Self-righteousness (vs. 25-32)

The older brother, who had not squandered his inheritance and never left his father, returned from the field and heard the celebration. When he learned all that his father had done for his younger brother, he was insulted and angry. His reaction is an interesting twist to the story. The younger son's repentance exposes the hardness of the self-righteous older son. You see, a sinner's repentance should be good for a saint's heart. It should be worth celebrating. His reaction, however, tells us that even though the older son had never left the family farm, his heart was far from the father. Augustine articulated this reality in his *Confessions*. He said, "For it is not by our feet, nor by change of place, that we either turn from Thee or to Thee...in darkened affections, lies (the) distance from Thy face." R. Kent Hughes points out that the younger son had been far from the father because of sins of passion, but the older son was separated from the father through sins of attitude.

While many people want to see themselves in the younger son, the truth is they might align more closely with the older son. He looked really good on the outside. He was respectable, obedient, dutiful, steady, and moral. None of these traits were characteristic of the younger son. The problem with the older son was that his heart was completely out of sync with that of his father, and he did not know it. He did not possess the love and compassion of his father. In fact, he was sorry to learn of his brother's return. Even greater, he was angry that a party was thrown for him. This older brother suffered from an acute case of self-righteousness. He thought that he should have been celebrated because of how well he had obeyed and served the father. In his mind, he had earned the father's favor.

Self-righteousness is dangerous and even deadly. In it we tend to think that self-help is what makes our lives better. Therefore, we expect others who are broken by sin to pull themselves up to be the kind of person deserving of God's love. Self-righteousness seeks to earn rather than receive acceptance. It is prideful. As such, the Savior never accepts or celebrates it. Repentance, on the other hand, is what God celebrates.

5. The Joy of Repentance (vs. 7, 10, 32)

A party is thrown in each parable when the lost object is found. Jesus is telling us that all of heaven rejoices over sinners who repent and turn to God. There is great joy and celebration when even one sinner repents because each and every person holds great value. God is willing to leave the ninety-nine to search for the one that is lost. He diligently turns the lights on and moves all the furniture in the house to find the one lost coin because of its immense value. He refuses to give up, move on, or replace it. He compassionately waits and watches for the lost son to return, and then He runs to embrace and receive him into the family. He refuses to be swayed from celebrating the lost being found. Quite the opposite! He throws the biggest party and invites all of heaven and the church to celebrate, for this is fitting because the sinner was once dead and now is alive. The sinner was lost, and he is now found.

There is joy in heaven and the church when sinners repent. There is also joy in the sinner. The lost son, who hoped only to be received as a hired servant, is overjoyed to learn that he was received as a son. He fully understood his unworthiness, so the fact that he was welcomed flooded his heart with joy.

Conclusion: Three words summarize Luke 15: lost, found, and joy. These three parables answered the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes who were offended by Jesus' interaction with lost sinners. This chapter also makes clear that God welcomes and forgives repentant sinners. This is the message of salvation. The parables also reveal two aspects to this salvation. There is God's part: the shepherd seeks the lost sheep, and the woman searches for the lost coin. There is also man's part: the prodigal son willingly repented and returned home. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are the tracks that salvation run along.

Much like the young boy who felt the love being shared through D.L. Moody's Sunday School, I hope you feel the love of God and sense His joy over you. Whether or not you are the wayward son living recklessly apart from God or the self-righteous son living pridefully before God, you are loved and valued by God. Both types are far from God, but as the parables indicate, He is searching and looking for your return. He longs to welcome and celebrate your return and repentance.

Lost, found, and joy...which words accurately describe your story? Are you lost in your sin and facing the fullness of its consequences? If this is your situation, then allow those consequences to be the grace that leads you to the loving Savior. Have you been found and embraced? If so, then allow the grace and love you have experienced to lead you to rejoice when lost sinners are found.