

Luke 15

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[0 : 00] I wanted to get back in Luke 15. I wanted to tackle Luke 15 before I went. Partly because Luke 15 is so familiar isn't it? It is so loved. It has been so analysed. Whole volumes have been written on Luke 15. Lots of sermons have been preached on Luke 15. And many of them are wonderful. Most of them are wonderful. And yet I think this passage is kind of psychoanalyzed probably too much.

So just let it be 3 with me. I want to deal with it all in one because it's one parable. It's not three parables. So Jesus told them this parable. And so there's one very very simple message that runs all the way through. It's stories of what was lost and it's now found.

You know what it's like to lose and then find. You know what it's like to lose your credit card. To lose your oyster card. You know as you get on the bus and you can't find it. And everybody's behind you moaning London commuters.

And you lose your eyes and you lose your eyes and then suddenly you find it in your inside pocket. And you rejoice because what was lost is now found. You know what it's like to lose? Keys. And you can't find them anywhere. Where have you moved them to? Where have you left the keys? And then you find them.

Some people know the anguish of seeing parents who have lost a child. Or maybe you have lost a child. And then the great joy and the great relief when that child is found and your heart starts to beat again.

[1 : 35] And if you look at Luke 15 here our Lord Jesus is talking to us about four lost things. It's very very simple. Four lost things or people. But it's a chapter that tells us far more about God than it does about people. And that's important to remember.

It tells us first of all that the category that matters to God. The categories that matter to God are not your race. And not your age. And not your sex. Not your denomination. Not your wealth or your socio-economic status.

All of that is irrelevant to God. The thing that really matters to God is whether or not you are lost. Or previously lost and now found. That's what matters to God.

So first of all let's see the first lost here. It's there in verses 1 to 7 isn't it? And here is a shepherd. Here is a shepherd and he's got 100 sheep. And sheep naturally wander. And the shepherd secures the 99 and then he searches for the one.

And when he finds the one look at verse 7. Just so I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

[2 : 55] The second lost is in verses 8 to 10. A woman has 10 coins and the coins are helpless. One preacher helpfully said isn't it?

If the coin was not found what would it be? Lost forever. And that is what a coin is. It is helpless. The coin cannot bleat.

The coin cannot attract attention to itself. So the woman turns the house upside down. And Jesus says in verse 10. Just so I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Now notice in these parables. Jesus says there is something lost. There is a search that takes place. And then there is great relief and joy in the find.

The seeking shepherd. The searching woman. Well that is God isn't it? The lost sheep. The lost coin. Well that is us. Because apart from God we are helpless.

[3 : 59] And we are hopeless. And God is the searching God who loves to find. He is not contented with the 99 sheep. He is not contented with the 9 coins.

He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But he parties. He parties. He parties. When anyone turns around and comes to him. He parties at the finds.

And it may well be in the light of those two stories. That you realise he hasn't actually found me. Yet. He hasn't found me. I know I am lost. And sitting here waiting to be found.

And God had better get his act together. And so if that's you. Well go over the page. Because you notice there begins the third loss. And it's the loss of the man. Who says there was a man who was 11 who had two sons.

And the younger of them said to his father. Father give me the share. Of the property that is coming to me. What's he saying there? He's saying to the father. I'd rather you were dead.

[5 : 00] I'd rather you were dead. I want my share of the estate now. Let's think of London Zoo. Maybe you've been to London Zoo. And there is a lion's enclosure. Isn't there? Within London Zoo.

There's a lion's enclosure. Now imagine this. Imagine one of the lions decides. I want out. I want out. I want freedom. And so he gnaws through the fence. Somehow eats the plastic of his enclosure.

He goes through the wire. And he escapes. The lion thinks. I need to get out of this enclosure. Well what did the lion get into? What did he get into?

He escapes from his enclosure. He gnaws through the metal and the plastic and the wire and the wood. Well what does he get into? Well just a larger enclosure called the zoo isn't it? The lion doesn't escape by getting out of his enclosure.

He's still stuck isn't he? Within the zoo. And you see the search for freedom is an elusive search. Here is the lion out of his small enclosure into a larger enclosure.

[6 : 05] And here is the younger son. I want freedom. I'd rather have you dead. I want my share of the estate now. I want that money. And as the younger son on this elusive search for freedom.

He takes on his one third of the estate. And Jesus says. Can you see it? He squanders it. Verse 13 in reckless living. And when the money goes.

So does his friends. And he's reduced. Well to this isn't it? These rather lowly tasks. For any man. But particularly a Jewish man.

Of swilling the pigs. And in the midst of the swill. He looks at his hands and he says. I will go back to my father. Verse 18. I will arise and go to my father.

And he rehearses his confession. Father I have sinned against heaven. And before you. And I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Would you please take me back?

[7 : 04] Would you please take me back? As one of your hired men. And Jesus focuses on this father. Here is a father. Who every meal time. Knows that he has two sons.

But when he comes to the dinner table. There is an empty seat. And as any father will tell you. When he sees his son. As a speck on the horizon. He knows that it's his son. Parents you know. Your children's walks. Don't you? You can tell it. And here we see that Jesus says. This father sees his son. While he is a long way off.

And verse 20 is unheard of. It's one of the most remarkable verses. In all the Bible. A senior man. This landowner.

Hitches up his roads. Bears his legs. And runs his son. Now I've thought about this. And I was thinking about some of the senior. Older men in our church family. And it is unheard of.

[8 : 04] For them to show their legs in public. Isn't it? There are some of them. That show their legs in public. But. Now Chuck is not here today. So I can say this. I've known Chuck for 11.

Well for 12 years actually. But I have never seen Chuck in shorts. Never. Even on the hottest day. That this country has ever had. I was with him. And he didn't wear shorts. We were in Florida. And we stayed in a beachside apartment. In one of our fundraising trips. It's hard work out there. And we went for a walk on the beach. We can go swimming. But Chuck didn't wear shorts. And British men I think are a bit similar aren't we?

Some of us wear shorts. The other of us won't. But in the Middle East. In those days. It's unheard of. Here is a man. Who has robes on. And in order to run in robes.

You must hitch up the robes. You must bare your legs. And his son begins to blurt out this confession. I've sinned against heaven and before you. And he swept off his feet. And the father says. Bring the robe for his shoulders.

[9 : 04] Bring the ring for his finger. Father I'm no worthy. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Bring the sandals for his feet. Kill the farted calf my son.

For my son who was dead is now alive. And the one who was lost is now found. And here he is enveloped by the warmest of receptions. And even his confession is interrupted.

He doesn't finish it. And he doesn't get the chance to finish it. What are we seeing here? Do you see it? Three lost. Verses 1 to 7. 1 in 100. Verses 8 to 10.

1 in 10. Three lost. 1 in 2. The sheep did not search for the shepherd. The coins did not pop up and find the woman.

But the son returns to the waiting father. Verse 17. When he came to himself. When he came to his senses. Now Jesus in telling the story.

[10:03] Jesus knew. Jesus knew that in his day rabbis had a similar story to this. And the son comes back to his father according to the rabbi's story. And he says father I've sinned against heaven. And against you.

Will you please take me back as one of your hired men? And in the rabbinical story. The father says I will my boy. But you've got to learn your lesson. You're on probation.

So down to the bank house for you. Down to the workers. With the hired men. But there's nothing like that here. Nothing like that here. Look again.

Look again at verse 20. Let it feed your soul. And he arose. And came to his father. But while he was still a long way off. His father saw him. And felt compassion.

And ran and embraced him. And kissed him. God is the shepherd who seeks the wandering sheep. God is the woman. Who searches for the lost coin.

[11:01] God is the father who waits for the wayward son. The lost sheep. Is most safe. In the flock. The lost coin.

Is most secure. In the purse. The lost son. Is most human. In the place. Where he is meant to be. Accepted. In the security. Of the home of the father.

Come home. Come home. It's a wonderful. Simple chapter. Come home. Stop wandering. Stop wandering in the far country.

And come home. Come home to God. I don't know how you think of God. But sometimes I think of God as a judge. Sometimes I think of God as a headmaster.

Sometimes I think of God as a policeman. But Jesus who knows God best of all. Says he is like this. Verse 20. While he sees the prodigal a long way off.

[12:06] The father runs to him. Feels compassion for him. Embraces him. And kisses him. Here is grace. Here is generosity.

Here is mercy. Here is the divine humility. The divine humility. Which hitches up his robes. And bears his legs.

And sweeps the sun off his feet. It is just like. Isn't it? The God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To humble himself. To win the lost. It is not like the remote idols.

It is not like the cold gods. Of other religions. Is it? It is not like the indifferent gods. Of other religions. Who are distant. And remote. And unpredictable.

Here is the God and father of our Lord Jesus. But while he was still a long way off. His father saw him. The one. Who was most offended.

[13:09] By what he had done. And he sees him. And he runs to him. And he feels compassion for him. And he embraces him. And he kisses him.

Did he deserve it? Dad I'd rather have you dead. I've squandered this faith. Did he deserve it? No. What is operative here is grace.

God treating people. Contrary. To their deserving. Christianity is not about earning.

It is not about deserving. It is not about building merit. It is about grace. My receiving God's kindness.

When I deserve his judgment. Holly. Holly was determined. That her relationship with John. Would grow on the right basis. John had read a book.

[14:08] That Holly had donated. To the local library. And he was so taken with. The notes of this woman. In the book. From the library. In this Christian book. That he asked the librarian. For a contact address.

This is before the days of data protection. Alright. And the librarian. Lived John the address. Holly had moved into state. And they began corresponding. It was World War II.

World War II intervened. And before John went into the US Navy. He wrote to Holly. And they'd be writing for a couple of years now. He said. Could I have a photo of you. To take with me.

Into the Navy. Holly wrote back crisply. And said. No way. If our relationship. Is going to develop. It will not develop. On the basis of looks. It will develop.

On the basis of character. For five years. During World War II. They continued to write to one another. Back and forth. And finally. John said. At the end of the war. We need to meet. She said. [15:03] Right now is the time. They met at New York Central Railway Station. They met on a platform. And they were to meet. At a particular time. In the afternoon. John said. You will know me. Because I will be in US naval uniform.

Holly said. You will know me. Because I will have a red carnation. In the right lapel of my suit. So he went. And as he was waiting. The time came. And this absolutely beautiful.

Blonde lady. Came down the platform. She walked up to John. He was so taken with her. That he didn't notice. That she didn't have. The red carnation. In her right lapel. But she seemed to be giving him the eye.

She walked past him. And she kept looking. Over his shoulder at him. He was stunned. He thought she was. Absolutely beautiful. And then he looked up at the platform.

And he saw Holly. Coming towards him. With a red carnation. In her right lapel. Now he knew. Why she didn't want him. To have her photo. She was much.

[16:02] Much older than he thought. So where would he go? To the blonde. Who seemed so keen. Or to Holly. He turned to the left. And said. How do you do Holly?

My name is John. The lady said. Young man. I don't know what is happening here. But that blonde over there. Told me to wear this carnation. And to tell you. If you came up to me. She's waiting in the coffee shop.

Opposite you. If you'll come up and talk to me. Now do you see Holly? He's crafty isn't she? She knows.

That the man she's going to marry. She's going to marry. On the basis of character. And relationship. And not looks.

And she goes to an awful lot of trouble. To make sure that she's going to marry this man. That he will not. If she's going to marry this man. That he will not marry her. On the basis of looks. Which come and go. But he will marry her.

[16:59] On the basis of character. Now do you not think. Do you not think. That God is equally determined. He is equally determined.

That your relationship. With him. Will not be based on marriage. What a blasphemy that is. Oh I've got to be good enough for him.

God is determined. That our relationship to him. Be based on our undeserved kindness. On his undeserved kindness. God never ever does anything towards me.

Because he owes me. None of us deserve God's kindness. And that is why all the Christian poets. When they talk about grace. Or love. They add the adjective amazing.

Isn't it? It is amazing grace. It is amazing love. How can it be that thou my God. Shouldst die for me. God did not love the world.

[17:59] Because we were lovable. God loved the world. Even though we were rebellious. The empty cross. The empty tomb. It is not because we deserved it.

It is all grace. And that is the point of the four loss. Because there are four loss. Look at the fourth loss in verse 25. There is an older brother.

There is an older brother. And he comes home. And he simply cannot accept grace. So verse 25. Says now his older son was in the field.

And as he came. And drew near to the house. He heard music and dancing. And if you go back to chapter 15. In verse 2. It tells you very clearly there.

You will see who that person is. Verse 2 Luke says. The Pharisees. And the Pharisees and the scribes. Grumbled. They murmured. Saying this man received sinners.

[19:01] And heathens with them. Who is this older brother meant to be? It is meant to be the religious. It is meant to be the person. Who is superior. The self righteous.

So when he gets home. Verse 28. He won't get in. And his father. Comes out and says.

Please. Please. Please. Come in. Your brother has come home. Verse 29. He answered his father. Look. These many years. I have served you.

I have slaved for you. Literally. And I never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat. That I might celebrate with my friends. I've always obeyed you father.

And notice what he says. He doesn't say this brother of mine. But he says this son of yours. And he thinks the worst of him. He says he squandered your money. Your property with prostitutes.

[19 : 58] How did he know that? He didn't know that. None of us know that. What he resents most. Is that the father gave away. So freely.

The father gives away. So freely. What he had spent his life. Trying to earn. And he resents grace. He didn't need grace. Look at verse 29. Another way of putting verse 29.

Is father you owe me. You owe me. All these years. I've been striving for you. And he's right. And the neighbours would say. Good old Jim.

If the father's name was Jim. Those two sons of his. Well it's a good job. It's a good job. He's got the second son. Isn't it? Or the first son. It's a good job. He's got the oldest boy. He's the responsible one.

Isn't he? And he's a good worker too. He was right. But here is a father. Who relates by grace. And in no other way. Israel tragically.

[20 : 55] The people of God. Did not want a relationship of grace. And that's Israel's problems. Isn't it? We've kept the law. We've done our religious duty.

We are good people. They could not accept. That God could give away so freely. To tax collectors. And sinners. What they had worked so hard to achieve.

They're a nation of Jonah's. Aren't they? The book of Jonah. Jonah resents. The amazing.

Generous. Overflowing grace of God. That's why it's there. And that is what religion can do for you.

And that is what self-righteousness. Certainly does for you. Go to Nineveh. Jonah says. No way. I'm not going to Nineveh. I know exactly what you're like God. And so God's prophet goes. The exact opposite way.

He's tarshish. Because Jonah resents. The operation of grace. The grace of God. In the lives of others. It tells us.

[21 : 57] This parable. You can be desperately lost. In the pubs of London. You can be desperately lost. In the brothels of London. You can be desperately lost.

In the clubs of London. You can be desperately lost. In the pews. Or the seats. In church. In London. And you can be so desperately lost. In the pulpit.

Behind the lectern. In London. Religion. Self-righteousness. A lost sheep. That is found. A lost coin. That is found. A lost younger brother. That is found. A lost older brother. But there is no record. That he was found.

He is lost profoundly. Jeffrey Dahmer. Lived in the state of Wisconsin. He killed 17 people. He was a serial killer.

[22 : 53] He ate part of the body. Of each of his victims. Before he was caught. He was caught. Sentenced to 957 years. In prison. In Wisconsin.

During his first few months. In prison. A very faithful. Gospel chaplain. A Christian chaplain. Came and shared the gospel. With him. And Jeffrey Dahmer. Turned. To Jesus Christ.

In repentance. Are you not scandalised. By that? That a beast. Like Jeffrey Dahmer. Will be in heaven.

I find that very difficult to handle. But it is the same grace. Isn't it? The same grace. That Jeffrey Dahmer. Depends upon. That you and I depend on.

We have no right. To be morally superior. To anyone. It is not earning. It is not achievement. God deserves me. In his grace.

[23 : 53] And that is the enduring message. Of Luke 15. Christianity. Is not deserving. It is not earning. It is not merit. That is religion. Christianity alone.

Is grace. And is undeserved. Generosity. And that is what matters. To God. Whether you are lost. Whether you are still. Earning your way. Whether you are still. Trying to deserve. Whether. You are lost. Or whether you have been found. Been found by God.

And are formerly lost. He is the God. Who takes no pleasure. In the death of the wicked. And neither do we. But while he was still.

A long way off. His father saw him. And felt compassion for him. And ran to him. And embraced him. And kissed him.

A long way off. His father saw him. And felt compassion for him. And ran to him. And embraced him. And kissed him.

[24 : 50] Welcome home son. Welcome home. Let's pray. Let's pray.