

Lost People Matter to Jesus - Part 1
Luke 15:1-7

The CEO of a very large company called the home of one of his employees about an urgent problem with one of the main computers. His call was greeted with a child's whispered, "Hello?"

The CEO asked, "Is your Daddy home?"

"Yes," whispered the small voice.

"May I talk with him?" the man asked.

To the boss' surprise, the small voice whispered, "No."

The caller persisted, "Is your Mommy there?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"May I talk with her?"

Again, the small voice whispered, "No."

"Well, is there someone else there I might talk to?" the CEO asked the child.

"Yes," whispered the child, "a policeman."

"Well then, may I speak with the policeman?"

"No," whispered the child "he is busy"

"Busy doing what?" asked the boss.

"Talking to Daddy and Mommy and the Fireman," came the whispered answer.

Now the caller was growing concerned and just then he heard what sounded like a helicopter in the background, so he asked, "What is that noise?"

"A helicopter," answered the whispering voice.

Alarmed, the boss nearly shouted: "What is going on there?"

In a whispering voice, the child answered, "The search team just landed the helicopter!"

"Why are they there?"

The child whispered, "They are looking for me ... they think I'm lost!"

Today I am beginning a new Sunday morning sermon series from the Gospel of **Luke chapter 15** which has been described by some as God's lost and found chapter of the Bible.

In this chapter Jesus tells a parable (that is what verse 3 says) consisting of three stories about lost things.

The first part of the story is about a lost sheep.

The second part of the story is about lost silver.

And the final story, perhaps the most famous story of Jesus, is about a lost son.

Look at **verses 1 and 2**, and you will notice why Jesus told the stories contained in this very special chapter of the Bible.

Verse 1 says...

1 ¶ Then drew near unto him (JESUS) all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

Jesus was like a spiritual magnet. People were drawn to Him.

The publicans and sinners were especially interested in hearing the teachings of Jesus.

That fact in and of itself is significant when you consider who the publicans and the sinners are.

We run across the publicans being mentioned in the New Testament several times.

Perhaps the most notable of the publicans we know of from scripture is a man Luke tells us about in chapter 19, a man named Zachaeus.

Zachaeus and his fellow publicans were some of the most unpopular people of their time. The reason they were not well liked was their job and how they did their job.

Publicans were tax collectors for the Roman government. They performed their duties as (what we would call) "private contractors."

They were responsible to collect let's say \$500 tax from farmer Fred, but when they went to see farmer Fred they told farmer Fred that he owed \$750 tax...and that extra \$250, guess where it went...it went into their own pockets.

Publicans were despised because they were viewed as liars and thieves...and traitors because they were helping the Roman Government oppress the Jews.

The religious establishment of the day especially disliked them and excluded them from any participation in the temple..... any religious life.

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus was also popular with the "sinners."

The word "sinners" refers to one who is literally devoted to sin.

No doubt, though Luke does not tell us, this group probably included prostitutes, dishonest businessmen, drunks, thieves... that was the crowd Jesus was popular with. The outcasts, the riff raff so to speak.

Notice in verse 2 that it says:

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

You see the word "murmured" that means that they were complaining...and that they were being critical of Jesus.

And what was their complaint?

He welcomed the presence of sinners and He spent time with them.

The Pharisees and scribes...just couldn't understand why Jesus (if He were a prophet from God) would give "**publicans and sinners**" the time of day.

Jesus tells the stories we find in this precious portion of God's word to rebuke the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes and to reveal to us why... publicans and sinners, the lost, matter to Him.

So notice the first story Jesus tells.

³And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

⁴What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

⁵And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

⁶And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

⁷I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

What was Jesus saying to his listeners with this story about a lost sheep. What does Jesus want us to learn?

Jesus want us to learn that...

I. SINNERS ARE LIKE THE LOST SHEEP

Jesus makes clear in this story that just like the sheep was lost, people can be lost as well, not just geographically lost, but spiritually lost.

The comparison of the lost sheep to the spiritually lost gives us some tremendous insight into the condition of the spiritually lost

For example... this comparison helps us to understand that...

1. The Lost are controlled by their nature.

Jesus doesn't tell us how the sheep in His story became lost, but I think we can take an educated guess. Now I am not a sheep-ologist or anything, but in preparation for this message I did a little research on sheep and I discovered that there is a reason sheep needed a shepherd, they predisposed to wandering away from the flock. That is how they are wired, that is their nature.

One evening a few weeks ago Angela and I had stopped to get a bite to eat and I forgot my cell phone in the car. I didn't even realize I didn't have my phone until I was on my way home. When I did, I picked up and checked it to see if I had missed any calls and I had just missed a call and I had a message. I did have a message, from the Austintown Police. They were at our house. That

is not the kind of message you want to have...right? Well, I get to the house and there are two police officers in our driveway. I hurriedly get out of the car to find out what is wrong and they proceed to tell me that someone had called them to complain about our barking dogs. Yes...our dogs were barking. Because of a miscommunication between Angela and Ben... the dogs got left outside on our deck and they apparently got excited about something and started barking aggravating a neighbor who called the police who showed up which made our dogs bark even more. I apologized to the police and one of the officers said in response, "don't worry about it, it's what dogs do!"

Why do sheep get lost? It is what they do.

People without a saving relationship with Jesus are lost because they wander away from God and the things of God, and they do so because of their sinful nature.

Isaiah 53:6 says... *‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...’*

This comparison of the spiritually lost with lost sheep also teaches us that...

2. The Lost lack Spiritual Understanding

Another thing I have learned about sheep is that they are intellectually challenged. They don't have much brain power.

Now you can teach a bird to speak, a dog can be trained to do all kinds of things. Dogs can help the blind. Dogs can be trained to sniff out bombs and drug dealers. It is amazing what some animals can be trained to do. Do you know what sheep can be trained to do? Nothing. Why, because sheep are dumb.

The spiritually lost are as described in Romans chapter 3:9-10 in a similar way.

Romans 3:10-11 says:

¹⁰As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

¹¹There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

What does that mean? It means that though a spiritually lost individual may be brilliant in many areas of life, they are clueless when it comes to spiritual truth.

They may be able to explain how to perform a heart transplant but be totally ignorant about how to make heaven their eternal destination.

The lost lack spiritual understanding.

Thirdly, the comparison of a lost sheep to a lost person teaches us that...

3. The Lost are helpless to save themselves.

When a sheep gets lost, it is not unusual for it to just lay down and concede that it is more than likely going to die. Lost sheep don't make their way back to the fold, back to the safety of the shepherds care, because they don't know the way back.

A dog can find its way home. A horse can find its way home. A cow even can find its way home. A cat, have you ever tried to get rid of a cat? Hard to get rid of those things, they come home.

A sheep is unable to save itself and not one spiritually lost person can save themselves.

Romans 5:6 says: For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says: ⁸For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.

And then notice that this comparison of lost sheep and spiritually lost people should open our eyes to the fact that...

4. The lost are facing great danger.

Let me impress you with one final tidbit of information about sheep. Sheep are defenseless against their enemies.

A lost sheep is an easy target for wolves, coyotes and other hungry critters. Sheep are easy targets because they don't know how to defend themselves. They are not wired for either flight or fight.

A horse can run and kick. The dog can bite, the cat can scratch, the skunk, we all know what they can do.

Did you hear about what happened when several little baby skunks and the mother skunk got cornered in a cave by a fox? It looked like the fox was going to get them, and that is when the mother skunk said to her children, "children, let us spray."

Listen, there is nothing more dangerous to a sheep than to be lost. Unless they are rescued, they will be destroyed.

Those who are spiritually lost are in great danger as well. And what is that danger? It is the danger of spending eternity separated from God in a terrible place called hell.

I know it is not very popular to preach about hell being a reality or something to fear, but I must. I am compelled by the authority of this book (the Bible) to warn everyone I possibly can of the great danger that awaits you if you do not embrace Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

Are you aware that Jesus believed in hell and often preached about it as well?

For example, in the sermon on the mount, **Matthew 7:13-14**, Jesus said:

¹³Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

In the very next chapter of Luke, chapter 16(vs. 19-31), Jesus gives the most graphic description of hell found anywhere in the Bible.

Jesus teaches that hell is real and that it is a place where the inhabitants exist in full consciousness of where they are. Jesus describes hell in that passage as a place of unrelenting, eternal torment.

*So, what does Jesus want us to learn from this story? Jesus wants us to learn that **SINNERS ARE LIKE THE LOST SHEEP.***

Jesus also wants us to learn that...

II. HE (JESUS) IS THE SAVING SHEPHERD

John 10:11...I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

The actions of the shepherd illustrate for us three very important things about the ministry of Jesus.

First

1. The purpose of Jesus' coming

... Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

2. The passion of Jesus' heart ... the shepherd went after one lost sheep

3. The power of Jesus' work ... laid it on his shoulders and brought it safely home

All of us have heard of the Titanic. In the early twentieth century it was the crowning achievement of human technology...it was billed as the "unsinkable ship."

In spite of all the expectations, we know what happened on this ship's maiden voyage. It hit an iceberg and in as little as two hours was on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

That horrific April night more than 1500 passengers and crew lost their lives. Friends and family gathered at the ship lines headquarters to discover the fate of their loved ones. Two lists were posted One that said ... SAVED and the other that said.... LOST.

There will be a day in your life... my life... in the lives of everyone we know when those are the only two words that will matter !