

Luke Chapter 15 v 1 - 10

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[0 : 00] It would be a great help for me if you could find a Bible and turn to Luke chapter 15. We're going to focus this evening on the first 10 verses of Luke chapter 15.

So it'd be a great help if you have that open before you. And with God's Word open before us, let me pray. Let me pray that the Holy Spirit would give us that attentiveness to His Word, and not just to listen, but to put into practice what the Lord Jesus Christ will say.

So let's pray. The psalmist says, So dear Father, we pray.

We pray at this point in the day that You would give us the energy we need, the attentiveness we need to Your Word. Help us to know again that it is You, the living God, who speak to us, Your creatures, Your children.

And so, Father, we pray that You would help us to listen. But not simply to listen and forget, but to listen and obey for the glory of Christ.

[1 : 27] Amen. Have you ever lost something really important to you? Now, different things. It may be you lose your passport.

Do you know people that have done that just before the big trip? They've been looking forward to it for very, very months. And then they get to the time maybe a week or a few days before, and someone says, Where's the passport?

And you haven't got a very elaborate system of filing in your home, so you don't have all the neat little folders. You just chuck it anywhere. And you get to this point, you think, Ah! I can't find it.

It may not be your passport. It may be tickets for the concert, or tickets for the train. You've gone on a big trip, or you've got that big show that you want to see. You've been looking forward to it for such a long time.

And you just can't see them. Or maybe you lose the car keys. How easy is that to do? You know you've got to be out of the house, and where are they?

[2 : 28] That's when you long for one of those gadgets. Have you ever seen them where you kind of whistle a little tune, and your car keys whistle back? I remember it was a few years ago when I was a little boy, and we were in America.

We were in Disney World, of all places. And I was about seven or eight. And I remember that's when we lost our car. You ever been at one of these big American car parks for these theme parks?

They are massive. And what you're supposed to do is you're supposed to remember the name of the car park. It's normally a Disney character, like Mickey Mouse or Pluto or something like that. But then you've got to remember the letter of your row and the number.

That's how you get back to your car. And we did neither of those things. All we knew that we had a brown car. Do you know how difficult that is to just find a brown car when you don't know even the registration number?

Or maybe you've had that horrifying moment. Maybe it's as a parent, or maybe you've been looking after children, and you look up, and you just can't see them. How does it feel?

[3 : 33] How do you respond when the thing that you have lost and that has gone missing is found? Well, if it's important, it's just almost instantaneous, isn't it? If you find your passport, if you find your tickets, if you find your car keys, I remember when we found our brown car.

Or when the child is brought back to you that has gone missing, and there it is. You cannot stop it. There's almost an instantaneous movement of joy in the heart, isn't there?

Because that's what happens when something that is lost is found. I say that to you because Luke chapter 15, in the section we're looking at tonight, finding lost things is at the very heart of the two stories of the Bible.

But it's not just about finding lost things. It's about all the emotions that should be part of finding the lost. We've got the lost sheep and the lost coin.

And at face value, these two stories are about things, sheep and coins. But of course, when you dig in, you discover that these two stories are not ultimately about things, are they?

[4 : 42] They teach as much truth about ourselves as creatures in God's world. And above all, they teach as much about God, the God of grace, who is the creator, the sustainer, and the savior of the world.

They teach as much about the heart of God. A God who takes great joy in seeking and saving lost sinners. Now, to help you follow through, I've broken this little section into three parts.

Verses one to three, the audience for the stories. Verses four to seven, the story of the lost sheep. And then verses eight to 10, the story of the lost coin. First, the audience for the stories.

And of course, your temptation, my temptation will be to dive straight into the stories. Because we know them, don't we? The sheep, the coin, the lost son, or the lost sons, as you prefer, we know the stories.

But before you dive in and think we know what it means, the first vital stage is to work out who Jesus was originally speaking to. The reason is because the same words can have different meanings depending on who they are spoken to.

[5 : 55] Suppose someone says these words to you, put your hands on your head. Well, what do they mean? Well, it depends on the context. It depends who's speaking to you. It may be that someone's playing a game of Simon Says with you.

It may be that someone is trying to teach you a little song, the actions for, you know, that song, head, shoulders, knees, and toes? Just in case you hadn't worked out what the actions would be.

Or maybe you're in the town center and there's a major incident and you're surrounded by armed police and they say, put your hands on your head. The same words, depending on the context, depending who they are spoken to, can have a very different meaning.

So who is Jesus speaking to? Look at verse 1. The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered.

The Pharisees are always muttering, aren't they? This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Now, maybe at first sight, the categories seem a little bit strange.

[7 : 04] We've got tax collectors and sinners. And then we've got Pharisees and teachers of the law. And if you've been at this church for many a month or many a year, surely you will know that everyone is a sinner, surely?

Does that not know what the Bible says? So why have we got tax collectors and sinners and Pharisees and teachers of the law? I thought everyone was a sinner. Well, of course, yes, in the biblical sense of sin as rejecting the Creator, in the sense of what is a sinner ultimately?

It is someone who lives in God's world but wants to live their way. It's cosmic treason. It is pushing the king of the universe off his rightful throne and saying, I will live in this world and I will determine what I think.

And of course, then that gets expressed in different ways. But the attitude at the heart of sin, however it is expressed, is shared by everyone in humanity. I will do it my way.

But in Luke chapter 15, the word sinner is used in a slightly different way. Because in the first century Jewish world, sinners were often seen as the people in the society who had lived a particularly immoral life.

[8 : 20] That's what Jesus is getting at here. That's what the Bible is teaching us. These are the people gathering around Jesus. Of course, everyone is a sinner in the rejecting God category. But in this world, you've got some people who are classified as sinners.

In the eyes of this first century world, people look down their noses at them because of the immoral life that they live. So you've got sinners. And then you've got them grouped together with tax collectors.

Do you like tax collectors? Well, most of us, well, they're all right. They're doing their job for the inland revenue. But most of us, well, we're not really going to categorize a hardworking employee of the inland revenue with someone of immoral standing.

And yet that's what happens here. Why? Well, because go back to the first century world and tax collectors were immoral people. They were the people that were cheating, the people that were stealing as much money from their contemporaries as they could.

So this is one group of people who are listening to Jesus. And in fact, did you notice, not just listening to Jesus. What do the Pharisees mutter about? This man not simply teaches them.

[9 : 37] Verse 2, this man welcomes them. And not simply does he welcome them, he eats with them. These people are eating with Jesus Christ.

That's incredible. See, eating with someone in that culture, even in our culture, is a pretty big deal. When you start welcoming people, eating with them, inviting them into your home, sharing a meal with them, that is a sure sign of real intimate fellowship.

Now, we mustn't conclude that Jesus was not challenging their immoral lifestyle. But dear friends, do get his big message. The big message of Jesus Christ was this.

You are welcomed as you are. You come as you are. And then, when you come to me, I will change you by the power of the Spirit. Do you get that?

His big message was not, if you want to come to me, if you want to come into my kingdom, then what you do is you begin to change your life, begin to make some changes, and then when you get to a certain standard, then come and sit the test.

[10 : 44] No, you come as you are, whatever you've done. And I will change you gloriously from the inside out. Now, in our culture today, in churches, we have some churches who have got it wrong on this side and got it wrong on this side.

You've got some churches who kind of proclaim a message that says, you are welcome as you are. God loves you. Now, just stay as you are because that's okay. Okay. It's called grace without repentance.

But then, often Christians swing to the other extreme, and you've got some churches who are heard to say, even if this is not what they were meaning to say, but they were heard to say, well, you must repent.

And what people hear is, I cannot come to Jesus until I have got to a certain standard. And Jesus stands here and says, you come as you are.

My grace will save you and rescue you, and then I will transform you. You cannot stay as you are. So that's one group. The other group are the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

[11 : 51] And they're not interested, did you notice, in eating with Jesus. They're not having a meal with Jesus. No, according to verse 2, what are they doing? They're muttering at Jesus. Why are they so angry?

Well, what you've got to realize is that their whole religious system was about doing your best. It was about being a good person in order to be accepted by God.

So therefore, they couldn't understand what Jesus was doing. Because if that's how you got it acceptable to God, what on earth was he eating with these people for? But of course, if Jesus was right, then Jesus' actions threatened their entire way of life.

It threatened to destroy everything they stood for. And you know something? When religious people are threatened, they get very angry. So these are the different types of people within the earshot of Jesus Christ.

And these are the people that Jesus now addresses with these three stories. Do you see that verse 3? Look at the connection. Then. It's a wonderful word, isn't it? You're told who's listening. Then Jesus told them this parable.

[12 : 58] And notice that the next three stories are categorized as this parable. They're all connected together. But all three stories that are going to come from the mouth of Jesus Christ, this parable, are directed to the groups in front of him.

Why do I say that? Because if you are to understand some of the detail in the stories that come next, it won't make any sense to you until you understand that there are two different types of people listening. So some of the truth in these stories is going to be an amazing comfort for the sinners and the tax collectors who are going to be overjoyed as they listen to Jesus teach this.

But for the self-righteous, religious do-gooder, oh, there's going to be some challenging stuff. Let's look at them.

The story of the lost sheep. Now, at one level, it's fairly easy, isn't it, to understand the story from one point of view. It's a rather sweet story, isn't it? It's a rather sweet story about a shepherd who loses a sheep and then he does all he can to find it and then he puts the sheep on his shoulders and that's not easy, isn't it?

Ever tried to lift a sheep? Put it on your shoulders and carry it back? That's not easy. And then they have a party. So it seems a lovely little story. What's it really all about?

[14 : 18] Well, ultimately, it's about the identity of Jesus. It's about the identity of Jesus as the promised divine shepherd who was promised in the Old Testament to come and rescue the lost sheep of Israel.

If you know your Bible, some of you are thinking, I think I know where he's going to go. I'm not going to ask you to put up your hand just in case you're wrong. What am I talking about? Remember the book of Ezekiel? Ezekiel chapter 30.

I know the book of Ezekiel, one of your favorite Old Testament books. Ezekiel chapter 34. This is what we're told. Verse 1. The word of the Lord came to me, Son of Man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

Prophesy and say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says. Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves. Should not shepherds take care of the flock? That's the elementary question.

Of course they should. But they don't. You've not strengthened the weak or healed, the sick or bound up the injured. You've not brought back the strays or searched for the lost.

[15 : 15] You've ruled them harshly and brutally. And what's God's answer? To the devastating situation in Israel many hundreds of years before Jesus comes. Verse 11 of Ezekiel chapter 34.

For this is what the sovereign Lord says. I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after a scattered flock when he is with them, so I will look after my sheep.

I will rescue them from all the places where they are scattered. Wow. You come into the New Testament, you come into Luke chapter 15, and it's not just a sweet little story, is it, about a shepherd finding the sheep.

You've got an amazing claim about the identity of Jesus Christ because what has he come to do? To come to seek and save the lost. That's what he's doing in the very eyes of the Pharisees.

He's claiming to be the divine shepherd from Ezekiel chapter 34. And therefore, as we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we have an insight into the very heart of God.

[16 : 22] And what a very attractive picture it is. Because what does it teach us? The big truth of this story is that God takes the initiative to seek the lost, and he does everything it takes to save the lost.

Do you get that? He takes the initiative to seek the lost, and he does everything it takes to save them. What does it mean to be lost from God? Well, it means to be far from his loving presence.

To be far from the security, the significance, and the satisfaction that only God can give people. It means to live in God's world and yet to be confused, pretty clueless about where we have come from, what we should be doing, and where we should be going.

Ultimately, if it's not fixed, then it will lead to people being excluded from God's love forever. We had a beach mission in Scarborough last week. Some of you were praying.

Some of what we did in the evenings, we did some spiritual questionnaires on the promenade of the North Bay. It was wonderful. I love doing these things. People were strolling along. They have a meandering attitude.

[17 : 31] They're more likely to stop. So we asked them three questions. What kind of God do you believe in? Do you think you need a savior? And where do you think you'll be in a thousand years' time?

Nice, gentle, and dear questions. Overwhelmingly, people were clueless.

Completely clueless. But, not that bothered, because even though they didn't know the answer to where they were from, what they should be doing, and where they were going, they thought of themselves really as kind of good people, and at the end of the day, everything would work out okay.

That's the world we live in, friends. But notice that God doesn't just leave the sheep and let them come back under their own steam.

He doesn't just sit in heaven and think, well, being lost isn't good, is it? But we'll wait and see if they come to their senses and come back.

[18 : 38] Not in this story. The shepherd goes out. He does whatever is necessary to bring the lost sheep home, and it is costly.

He does it until he finds it. Did you notice that? Verse 4. He goes, after the lost sheep until he finds it. We've got this thing in our house where we call, it's the difference between what we call man-looking and female-looking.

Do you know the difference? Like a man, me, mainly, will be sent to look for something in the house, and I can be there looking for days, and I don't find it.

You send my four-year-old daughter and she gets it like that. This is not man-looking, is it? Until it is found.

Now this is even more remarkable when we remember how it is that we got lost. Because there's many different ways to get lost in life, isn't there?

[19 : 51] Sometimes we get lost by accident, sometimes it's a careless mistake, sometimes it's a deliberate snob. Remember the first time I was in Scarborough with Vicki. It was our second date. I was in how at the time?

2007. Go back in time. 2007. Second date, I'm trying to impress her. So we go to the Sea Life Center. I had one of those elementary sat-nav things. I didn't know how to use it.

It was my mum's sat-nav that she had given me. All I knew is that you needed some sort of postcode. So I'd taken the first three letters of the postcode for the Sea Life Center.

Normally there are six, aren't there? I had three. So there we were following the sat-nav. It was going pretty well, you know, and travel this way for four miles or whatever and then just turn right and so on.

And then it was saying you will reach your destination in 400 yards. I was in the middle of a council estate. I had no idea where it was. And then it said you have now reached your destination. And I thought, unless they put the Sea Life Center in the back of someone's garden, I don't think we have.

[20 : 55] But then there were no smartphones there, so we didn't, I don't know how we got out. And how we found. We were completely lost. How did we do that? Well, of course, I didn't know how to work the sat-nav. There are different ways to get lost.

Sometimes it's by accident. Sometimes it's careless. Sometimes, however, someone may give you a clear instruction and your arrogance and your pride, you say, I will do it my way. How does the human race get lost from God?

Carelessness? No. Accident? No. By supreme arrogance. That human beings say to their creator, who adores them and who loves them and who has laid out the instructions, no, we know better.

And therefore, we walk our own way and we get lost and it's our fault. And yet, even though the creator of the universe has been snubbed, even though in our arrogance we have rejected him, even then, the creator of the universe says, I'm coming for you.

I'm coming for you because I love you. I'm not coming to get you because I'm after you in the bad sense. I'm coming to get you because I want you to be rescued. Wow. That's God, isn't it?

[22 : 06] He takes the initiative to save us. He doesn't wait until we have made ourselves presentable or somehow we've cleaned ourselves up. No, he comes for us. He takes the initiative.

You know that God loves you? But he doesn't love you because you're lovely. You're not. He loves you because he is love.

And then he'll change you as he's changing me to make you more lovely. Now, what does this mean for Christians? I hope if you're not a Christian, I'm not assuming everybody is.

I hope if you're not a Christian and you're here and this is a real encouragement to you about what God thinks of you and what he wants for you. Let me challenge you if you're a Christian, what does this mean for us? Of course, Christians are to become more like Jesus.

So look at the heart of Jesus and you see the heart of God and at this point we are to be like God. We are to take the initiative in evangelism. Dear friends, if we are to be godly, we all want to be godly.

[23 : 14] To be godly means to be like God and what is God like? According to Luke 15, God takes the initiative to save people. But that is always uncomfortable, isn't it? We don't wait for people to come to us.

We need to go to them. We need to think of creative ways to connect with people to seek and to save the lost. So don't give up on that.

And don't just say to your church family, yeah, we used to do that 20 years ago. What are you doing today? It's not 20 years ago, is it? It's now.

So what are we doing as the people of God to take the initiative to seek and save the lost? And for your encouragement, our God is still in the business of taking the initiative.

Sometimes Christians will say to me something like, well, God won't really act until his people pray. Nonsense. God loves his world too much to wait for his rebellious people to pray.

[24 : 21] Yes, more would happen in his world if we prayed. Of course. But don't think God is dependent on our prayers before he takes initiative.

Isn't that great? God is forever in his sovereign grace taking initiatives to seek and to save the lost. Now, if you had been one of the tax collectors and sinners at this point, you are rejoicing in what you are hearing.

But what about the religious leaders? Well, there's a sting in the tail for them. Look at verse 7. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who do not need to repent.

What? 99 righteous people who do not need to repent. Who are they? If you know your Bibles, what does Paul write about in Romans chapter 3?

There is no one righteous. Not even one, let alone 99. But we all know people, don't we, who act as if they've never had a problem.

[25 : 36] We've all got our list of people who are worse than us to justify why we are relatively good. People who don't consider themselves as too great a sinner. And so, therefore, they're for people that don't need God's help.

And so, this phrase, if you were one of the original Pharisees and teaches the law, as you heard the Lord Jesus Christ speak about 99 righteous people who don't need to repent, oh, that's cutting, isn't it?

It's designed for the Pharisees and the tax collectors. It's supposed to stop them in their tracks. It's supposed to make them reconsider. It's supposed to make them ask, is this the stage we've got to?

Is that what we think of ourselves, that we don't have to repent? See, one of the most dangerous situations to be in is to be lost and yet not know you're lost.

That's very bad, isn't it? Maybe you've, at some point in your life, taken a coastal walk around these parts, maybe in Whitby, maybe in Scarborough, maybe on a foggy evening. And maybe you know the location pretty well, and maybe you know where all the paths are, and maybe you're secure in your path and you know how close you think you are to the edge.

[26 : 48] Well, if that's true, you're okay, aren't you? But what about a situation when you think you're on the right path that keeps you safe and you are lost in the fog and you are millimeters from the edge and you don't know that?

That's deadly, isn't it? To be lost and yet not know you're lost is incredibly dangerous. That's what was true of the Pharisees and the tax collectors.

To act as if you're not lost from God and don't need to repent is deadly. Just because many people in our country say, maybe there are people tonight who will say, I am not as bad as I could be, but I'm not as bad as them.

I am morally okay and on the road to heaven, so don't tell me I'm a sinner. Even though people say that, let me tell you something, it's not true. Because all of us are lost and need to repent.

So how can you tell if you're one of these self-righteous people? How can you tell whether you're never being genuinely saved by Jesus Christ or whether you are genuinely saved as a Christian but yet in the years gone past, well, you've just become a little bit proud of your moral achievements.

[27 : 58] Let me tell you how you know. It's about joy, friends. Notice how often rejoicing and joy is mentioned in this story? In particular, it's about the joy we feel when others become Christians, particularly from a lifestyle that is far different from us.

And when they start sitting next to you in churches and should be sitting next to you at dinner, there is joy in this story but there is joy in our hearts.

See, there is a group who are listening to Jesus and remember what Jesus is doing. He's welcoming people. He's eating with them. He's having a party with these people but there's a section who are not joining in.

There's a section that are not celebrating the finding of the lost. It's the Pharisees, the teachers of the law. Why? They don't rejoice because they've never repented. Because in order to rejoice properly, you must first have repented.

Personal repentance is the way to personal rejoicing. Let me ask you, if there is no joy in your life, is it a sign that you have never really repented? that yes, you are moral in one sense but you are a little bit self-righteous and the evidence for that is that there is no deep joy in your heart.

[29 : 20] Joy comes from repentance. Last story and more briefly. The story of the lost coin, there are similarities, aren't there, with the previous story.

Something is lost, someone takes the initiative. This time it's a woman. The numbers are different. It's not a hundred and one. It's ten and one. And this woman does all she can to find what is lost but the conclusion is slightly different.

In verse seven, the first conclusion had a comparison. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine who do not need to do it.

But look at verse ten. This time, there's no comparison. This time, verse ten says, in the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

No comparison. The spotlight now is on the individual and on the joy in heaven when a sinner repents. What a wonderful encouragement if you're one of these sinners or tax collectors to know that as you join Jesus Christ, as you were saved by him, as you join the party on earth, that in heaven there's a party for you.

[30 : 32] Wow! Wow! What an encouragement for them. What does this mean for us? Of course, remember as Christians, we are to share the heart of God and therefore, we are to rejoice when people become Christians.

Indeed, that is to be our greatest joy. Some of you, I'm sure, have come across the organization Christians Against Poverty, CAP. They have a major center in Bradford and of course, they are dedicated to try and help families.

Many of them have got themselves into serious debt issues in which they cannot escape. And they have all sorts of programs to try and enable families who are enslaved to debt to escape.

And it's a wonderful thing to see. They've got a major center in Bradford and many years ago I had the privilege of visiting. Did you know that they have a bell there? They have a bell that they ring.

But let me tell you something, they don't ring the bell when a family gets out of debt. They ring the bell when someone becomes a Christian. Because this is an organization that is not just trying to get people out of debt, but is doing all they can to tell people about Jesus Christ.

[31 : 45] And when someone becomes a Christian under their ministry and they hear about it, someone rings the bell. And everybody stops. Whatever they're doing and they pray.

Let me tell you, nobody tires of hearing the bell. Nobody says, oh, I've got ten more emails to write. Stop ringing the bell. The bell rings because someone has become a Christian.

And there is joy in the heart. Is that what moves you? Did that move you previously, but maybe not now? Is that what drives your church as you pray for Trinity Church Scarborough?

Is that what fuels our prayers when someone says, I need you to pray for me? Is it always about the sick relative? Yes, we pray about all things. Or are we saying, look, Lord, build your kingdom?

Our conversations, our actions. Why have we set up an evangelism team at Trinity Church Scarborough because we believe this joy must drive us our discussions and our actions?

[32 : 58] I want people to be driven by the bell. And I want my heart to sing when I hear people becoming Christians rather than thinking, oh yeah, someone else has become a Christian.

Great. What's for dinner? I think someone has crossed over from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the sun and they will live with Jesus forever.

Wow. We know, and I'll conclude with this, if you're a musician, if you know musicians, you will know that musicians often have to tune their instruments.

If you're an engineer, you know that engineers have to calibrate their machines. Christians have to re-align our hearts and our passions so that they are in line with the passions of heaven.

And what is the passion of heaven? The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal son of God, came to seek and to save the lost. Friends, live for the bell and do all you can so that you hear it ring as often as possible.

[34 : 26] Let's pray. Let me give you a moment to respond to God.

Maybe you are not yet a Christian tonight. You may have believed in a God. You may believe in Jesus. That doesn't make you a Christian. But trust your life to Jesus. Maybe you want to pray.

Acknowledge your sin. Thank the Lord for Jesus the Savior and commit from this day forward to following Him. You could do that tonight. Maybe it is in the past you've committed to Christ.

Maybe you you've become a little bit more like the Pharisees and tonight you need to realign your heart to grace. Maybe you've stopped living for the sound of the bell ringing. Maybe your life is not driven by those priorities.

What a night to pray for God to change us. Father, we pray that you would shape us by your Spirit that we would not forget these words from the Bible. But from this day onwards you would help us to be more like our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 35] In Hiddens' name we pray. Amen. As we remain standing. Father, we thank you so much for our gathering this evening.

Thank you for encouraging us through the truth of grace. Lord, we pray that we would not move away from the cross of Christ but instead that you would help us to grow deeper in our love of the Lord Jesus Christ to know more of his finished work for us and pray, Father, that you would empower us to be sent out into the world to live and speak for Jesus.

So may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen.