

# Luke 15

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     about two months ago my sister-in-law and her husband flew to Burkina Faso in Africa to begin serving as missionaries in that country they took their two and a half year old son with them and they're leaving an extended family in the UK and also in the USA her husband's American including his recently widowed mother who was undergoing chemotherapy for cancer I was attending their commissioning service a little over two months ago in Stoke and one of the things that really struck me and I reflected on having been there at the service was the question what someone has to believe in order to take that kind of step of going to Africa taking your young family leaving your sick mother they were offered the opportunity to serve in churches in the UK but they declined because they felt called by God to go and preach and to share the good news where Christ had not been preached and where Jesus wasn't known and so they've gone I think they're actually serving with a couple from the church here Ben and Liz Griffin that's right yeah I think they stayed in their house on the first night so there's a connection there in that sense now I don't think every one of us is called to make the same sacrifices they've made in going to become missionaries to serve overseas but we all do have to make prayerful sacrificial choices before God don't we as Christians and we all need to believe the same thing that they believed in order to go and serve in Africa because they really believe that Jesus came to save the lost and that lost people include people from every country around the world such that everyone needs to hear about Jesus Christ and what he has done now what I want to look at with you this morning from Luke chapter 15 is to to see that Jesus has come for the lost that Jesus has come to save the lost Luke chapter 15 I'm sure you know the chapter really well it contains probably three of the best known parables in the Bible three parables that are very similar in many ways but the great message of the great message of the great message of the chapter that

Jesus is speaking to us this morning is that he has come for the lost we see that by noticing why Jesus tells the three parables they're in response to some grumbling from the Pharisees if you look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 15 the Pharisees are grumbling about the kind of company that Jesus keeps and we read that now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him but the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered this man welcome sinners and eats with them now the Pharisees were the religious elites they thought that they had reached the top of their game spiritually and they thought that they were elite spiritually that they were the best spiritually because they were separate from people who were outwardly sinners they didn't want to get anywhere near to people who had been involved in sin in fact one of their writings said this let a man never associate with a wicked person not even for the purposes of bringing them near to Torah that's God's word so you see what they're saying there don't even come near to someone who's done wrong who's a sinner even for the purposes of sharing with them God's word in other words don't get your hands dirty with bad people not even to bring them to God but Jesus does not agree with them both in his actions and his words he disagrees strongly with them and so he tells these three parables to confront their thinking and to challenge them about two things first of all he wants to challenge them about who he has come for the purpose for which he's come and he's going to say to them and to us that Jesus has come for those who are lost that's why he tells the parable of the sheep and the coin but he doesn't stop there he doesn't just tell them that he's come for the lost because in the third parable the parable of the the sons of prodigal sons he shows us and then what it means to be lost what it looks like to be lost and that's what I want us to look at this morning for whom has Jesus come Jesus has come for the lost and then see what it means to be lost in that third parable so first of all let's see that Jesus has come for the lost now each of these three parables follows a similar pattern doesn't it there's something that's lost there's a search it's found and there is rejoicing when it's found but there are differences between the parables and we need to notice those differences as we go through them but in the first two parables that are very similar we see two things that show us that Jesus has come for the lost the first is that

Jesus undertakes a costly search for the lost in the first parable the parable of the lost sheep the shepherd who is a picture of God or Jesus goes out to seek a lost sheep that's a picture of us and he seeks it until he finds it he undertakes a costly search he has a hundred sheep and just one of his sheep goes missing and instead of thinking nothing of it he's got 99 other sheep he goes out and he searches he goes out into open country so he leaves his other 99 sheep in the open country and he goes out to search for this lost sheep now there are risks to doing that of course aren't there the 99 sheep in the open country aren't safe there are wolves and animals and thieves who would love to have a sheep but he takes that risk because he wants to find the sheep that's been lost he undertakes a costly search and when he finds the lost sheep well what does he do well he carries the lost sheep home now um there are at least two reasons why he might be carrying the sheep the first possibility is that the sheep is just tired and disorientated and it's been wandering all over trying to find its way and it's worn out it can't walk and so he puts it on his shoulders that's sort of the favorable way to look at the sheep the other way to look at the reason the sheep he's carrying is because it's it's uh it's stupid and of course although you can lead a dog or uh perhaps even a cat you can't do that with a sheep and and lead it the right way so he has to lift it and take it home because it just wandered off and he carries uh the sheep home and whichever of the two ways it is um it's not an easy thing is it to bring the sheep home it's costly um average weight of a sheep anything up from 20 kilograms it's a heavy thing to carry on your shoulders not light and the point is that the shepherd Jesus undertakes a costly search for this one lost sheep and again the same pattern comes out in the parable of the lost coin this woman loses one coin and she's got nine others but instead of just forgetting her coin she undertakes a costly search she lights a lamp in her house that would have cost her money because oil was expensive she sweeps the house to try and find it that would have been physically um tiring to do that and she seeks diligently she searches carefully until she finds the one coin that she's lost and the point is that in both cases there is a costly search for the thing that's lost i'm sure we all know what it's like to lose something some people lose things a lot don't they and some people not so often but um recent occasion that happened to me was i was taking our boys swimming in Leeds on the local swimming pools we got there a bit early and we needed a few things in the shop so i decided that we'd go to the supermarket across the junction uh to go and purchase some things now this is one of the busiest junctions in Leeds and there's five pedestrian crossings to create a cross to go from the swimming pool to the supermarket but wanting to go about an educational um activity thought it'd be a good thing to learn how to go through crossings carefully so we did that took them hand uh hands held tightly and uh they crossed the junctions and we got over to Morrison's and we bought the few things we needed and then went back over the five crossings and climbed the steps to the swimming pool as uh we were at the entrance paying uh lady told us how much it would be to go swimming and i went into my wallet tried to get my card out and it wasn't there i left it in Morrison's which of course the reason why you shouldn't take your children shopping um and uh so we crossed the five junctions again as a family into Morrison's got the card it was still there thankful for that rejoiced uh and then went back over the five junctions into swimming pool and of course the reason we took the boys swimming was to tire them out on a Saturday but by the time we got there they're exhausted and our second born Isaac just wanted to float around in the swimming pool on his back because he was tired now retrieving that card was costly wasn't it but it had value and so i wanted to retrieve it

and you undertake a costly search for something that really matters to you don't you and what we're seeing here is Jesus heart for the lost Jesus heart for those who are far from him that he undertakes a costly search for them because they matter to him A.W. Tozer said this what you think about God is the most important thing about you your idea of God is the most important thing about you and the reason he said that was that what you think about God will affect whether you come to him you know some people have this idea of God that he is withdrawn and unmoved by our rebellion that he sort of sat away from us like the angry head teacher who doesn't want to do anything just wants us to suffer but that's not what God is like God is moved by our rebellion he's saddened by it and he's so moved that he takes the initiative to seek us out and so he plans to send Jesus to be our savior knowing that we're going to rebel against him and Jesus comes and accomplishes a great rescue mission and at what a cost does Jesus come well just as a shepherd bore the sheep on his shoulders to bring him back so our savior the Lord Jesus bears our sins in himself so that we can be forgiven what a cost that we would be saved one person has made the point about these two stories that what is so remarkable is not that God should welcome back sinners but that God should seek out sinners because God is merciful and he seeks out lost sinners what you think about God is the most important thing about you because it will affect whether you come to him moreover it will affect how you behave towards God when we've messed up and we've sinned if we think that that God is withdrawn and angered and and not not merciful and kind and not willing to receive us when we've sinned against him and we come back to him then we won't come back to him when we've messed up and we've sinned like a sheep we've wandered away but if our thought of God is yes he's a God of justice and he is angry at our sin but he is loving and merciful that when we come back to him he welcomes us with open arms it also matters what you think about God because you'll become what you worship if your view of God is not that he is kind and merciful towards those who come back to him then you will become a person who is not kind and merciful you will become like the God that you worship this costly search of Jesus has a lot to say about how we approach people who don't know Jesus I wonder do you see people as being lost without Jesus Christ does it move you there are lots of things in life that make us weep and rightly so but does people's lostness move you Jesus wept didn't he over Jerusalem is it moving that people are lost and reaching out can sometimes be very costly can't it people tend to be free to talk when you're not have you noticed that you know when an opportunity opens up the Lord opens up a door with someone you've always got something else that's just pressing that you could go and do or you're late for something it will take time and energy that we feel we don't have you know think about the shepherd I'm sure the shepherd went down many wrong turnings searched in fields where the sheep wasn't there to find that sheep

and likewise we in seeking to reach out with the gospel will go down rabbit trails will go down wrong routes as it were there'll be setbacks there'll be difficulties but we'll take costly steps to reach out if we believe that jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost i think this also has something to say to us when we think about the mission and goal of the church you know reaching out with the gospel evangelism is not the only purpose of the church but it is one of the core purposes of the church isn't it one of the primary reasons for the church and we need that kind of focus as churches an outward focus on reaching out to those who are around you might know in leeds that we used to meet in a council art center but two months ago the building was closed for electrical problems and we're now back in our old building which doesn't really accommodate us on a sunday it's uncomfortable it's across two rooms of the video relay it's squashed the children are in offices for sunday school and one of our busiest services of the year is our christmas all age service just before christmas and that was a real challenge it was difficult to put that together people are saying well you know should we come it's going to be a squash it's going to be difficult but if christians don't come then who's going to talk to the guests if we don't put ourselves out to reach people then have we got the heart of jesus jesus came for the lost it was a costly search but then well briefly jesus rescue brings great joy it's in the second point the first point sorry jesus rescue brings great joy at the end of both these parables there is rejoicing over the one who is found in fact the shepherd brings home the sheep rejoicing and when he gets home verse six he calls his friends and his neighbors and says rejoice with me for i have found the sheep that was lost and the woman in verse nine when she finds her coin she says to her friends and neighbors rejoice with me i have found my lost coin now does that strike you as a little bit odd that they would have a party when they found something i mean the sheep has value but the shepherd has 99 others the coin has value probably about a day's wages but the woman has nine other coins i didn't throw a party when i found my card at morrison's i'm sure you don't throw a party when you find your car keys so why is there a party why is there rejoicing when the thing is found well it's to make the point about the value of the thing that has been found because of course the sheep and the coin represent people and jesus says there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents over one lost person who is found and so what we're seeing is that people really matter to god he rejoices when they come to him we're in the transfer window aren't we in the football season january is when when the transfers happen and great valuations are put on professional football players aren't they 40 50 60 million pounds one player huge amounts of money and they've got you know five eight years of of football and when you think about those kind of valuations i guess it makes me ask this question what value does god put on people of course the answer is there is no sum of money that you can put on a human life on a person on a soul they are infinitely valuable to god

[ 17 : 49 ] and if god has that kind of care for people we need that kind of care for people we need to stretch ourselves and and do things that we may not be comfortable doing may not be natural to us to help in that way but needs help so we do it we take steps it costs us to reach out and it brings delight to the heart of god to have sinners turn to him remember that in both parables others are called to share in the joy of the one who has made the find and there is a sense in which we're called to share in god's joy as people turn to him if you found that in your experience it's a real joy isn't it when that happens sometimes when i've been talking to someone about jesus and they want to find out more about him and maybe they come to know him they're really grateful that someone spent time with them and shared with them and sometimes it's almost an embarrassing gratefulness thank you so much and you're thinking stop saying that because you brought me joy i feel guilty that you're thanking me for something that's brought me joy that you've come to know the lord jesus now of course that doesn't just apply to those who do the speaking about jesus or in those kind of roles it applies to those who help with creche and sunday school so that the parents can hear it applies to those who drive people here in cars who put out chairs who make the coffee who run the sound house who give money to make it happen that's all sharing in the work of making jesus known and so when someone becomes a christian that's a reason for great joy that we can share in that as god rejoices we can rejoice as well people matter to god they matter so much that god sent jesus to save them so having seen that that jesus come for the lost and his confrontation with the pharisees and saying i've come for for all people anyone who's lost now jesus changes tact a little bit in the third parable that's what i want to focus on now because instead of addressing the question who has he come for that has come for the lost what jesus adds in this parable is that he shows us what it means to be lost he shows us what it looks like to be away from god and lost to god and the parable of the two sons looks at what it means to be lost and this of course is one of the best known of jesus parables but it's interesting if you um many children's bibles just have the first son and not the second and if we just have the first son i think there's an important lesson that we're going to look at that but actually it's in the second son the elder brother that jesus is really challenging the pharisees and we need to feel that this morning and see that because he's turning the tables on them because although they've grumbled about the kind of company jesus keeps they're probably happy with what they've understood as jesus definition of lost people so far which is the sinners they've grumbled about him welcoming sinners and jesus said well these people are lost and i need to come for them and they're happy with that because they see sinners as those who are outwardly rebellious who live the sinful lives publicly in that sense tax collectors those kind of or prostitutes those kind of things but what jesus is going to show in this parable is that both those who are sinners outwardly and those who are proud self-righteous pharisees inwardly are both lost because there's two ways to be lost you can either be lost by outward rebellion or inward self-righteousness

inward attitude that says i'm okay i'm right with god i live a good life i come to church i give money that makes me right with god god will be pleased with me for that but jesus shows the pharisees that they are just as lost so let's look at the parable briefly there's a father he has two sons the younger son asks for his inheritance early verse 12 and so the father listens to his request he does what he asks and he divides his estate properly he gave two thirds to the elder brother and one third to the younger that was how the estate was divided in those days so the younger brother stays around a bit but then takes his money leaves and goes and spends it on reckless living he gets into deep poverty and longs to just eat the food the pigs eat and his situation is dire isn't it when he gets right to the bottom he's involved in feeding pigs of course it's not a good thing to do if you're a jew and he doesn't have any money at all in fact he longs to just eat the pods that the pigs are eating now the pods are the rusks and so it's sort of the part of the vegetable that people wouldn't eat you tear it off and you make your vegetable you throw the rust into a bucket or something you take it out to the pigs and he wants to eat that kind of food stuff that humans don't want to touch he longs to eat that's how desperate his state is now we're not told exactly how he squanders his money the older brother suggests it was with prostitutes but the point is that he's wasting his life he squandered his money and he's wasting his life and there are lots of ways to waste your life not just by wasting money but wasting the life that God has given you not living for God but then he comes to his senses

I love the way it's described in verse 17 well he came to himself other versions have and he realizes his foolishness and he says even those men who work for my father have a better state than I do they have money they have food to spare I'll go back I'll seek my father's forgiveness and I'll offer to be treated like a servant not as a son but of course when he comes back to his father's estate his father is watching and sees him coming and he doesn't sit on the porch and wait in his chair for his son to come on his knees he runs to him he doesn't take him back as a servant but rather as a son he doesn't demand any repayment for the money that he squandered instead he gives him more and he's not angry with him instead he has a celebration he says kill the fattened calf the fattened calf is the best animal you have it's the one you save for a special occasion it's the best meat going on the farm and so he says let's have the fattened calf and let's get a robe on him let's have a ring on him let's put shoes on his feet and what we're seeing here because of course the father is God and we're like the sons what are being shown here is how God welcomes us when we repent how God treats us when we come back to him when we realize that we've lived as a rebel in this world that we've broken his commandments and we come looking to Jesus Christ alone how does God welcome us?

he welcomes us with open arms and Jesus is saying that is how God treats people who come back to him and that's so important because what you think about God will affect whether you come to him we don't want to come back to a parent when they're angry with us when we've done something wrong do we?

when we realize a parent is kind and merciful we'll come back and that's what Jesus is saying here God is kind and merciful and he freely forgives when we repent and look to Christ there's a very old story of a son who treated his parents just like this younger son treated his father they were loving kind parents and the son rejected all of that he went away from home he got into trouble in fact so much trouble he ended up in prison and his imprisonment affected his parents so badly that his mother died from the grief that this would happen to her son after he'd served his time in prison the son wrote a letter to his father and he said this father I disrespected you and I killed mother with grief I'm coming out of prison I'm getting the train home if you would take me back would you tie one white flag on the oak tree by the train station if it's there when I'm coming on the train and I'm approaching the station

[ 26 : 53 ] I'll get off and I'll know you'll welcome me back if there's no flag I'll stay on the train and I'll just keep going and you'll never see me again the son sent his letter and a while later he got on the train and as he was travelling on the train he faced all the anxiety of thinking what is going to be there on the oak tree think about that journey what is going to be there on the oak tree and as he approached the station he gets sight of the oak tree and there isn't one white flag on the oak tree there are hundreds covered in white flags and in that sign the father is saying to his son welcome back I will forgive your welcome home and this is how God welcomes us when we repent and maybe you're here this morning and you're like this younger son that you've lived an outwardly rebellious life maybe you've done things that no one else knows about that are very wrong and you're that kind of a rebel maybe you look at your life and say

I've wasted it as far as God is concerned and you're wondering will God welcome me back if I repent will God welcome me back if I come to Jesus is forgiveness for me has Christ made a way for me to be forgiven am I able to come and this parable is here to say to you yes God does he will welcome you back all you need to do is to come to yourself to come to your senses to come back to the Father and he freely forgives if we turn to him so if that's you this morning that's what you need to do you need to come to the Father and recognize your rebellion and trust in Jesus Christ who by his death on the cross has made a new and living way for all of your sin to be forgiven past, present and future so that's the younger brother but what about the older brother there's another way to be a lost son and the parable doesn't end with the return of the young son in the celebration does it it ends rather with the conversation between the father and the elder brother and the anger of the elder brother because what we see in this final bit in looking at this older brother we see that the older brother is a rebel not on the outside but on the inside that he is away from his father not by outward sinful living not by a wayward life but rather by an attitude of self-righteousness by thinking that you can be right with God by what you do because when the party starts on the inside because the younger son has come home the elder brother is fuming outside he's angry he's angry that his father has forgiven his brother he can't even bring himself to call his brother his brother you know that's how he speaks about him he says in verse 30 but this son of yours not my brother this son of yours he won't call him his brother and he thinks well this son who's gone out and wasted the money that you've given him father he comes back and you have a party but I've served you all these years verse 29 and you've given me nothing the older brother wants a relationship with his father based on how he's lived he wants to say

I have earned the father's approval I am a son because I deserve it I'm forgiven because I've been good I've earned it and this older brother is just like the Pharisees who thought that by their outward life they were right with God but Jesus is saying you cannot relate to God that way notice how the father responds to him he offers him forgiveness as well doesn't he the merciful heart of the father continues but not on the basis of what he will earn but still on the basis of the gift he says all I have is yours there's irony there isn't there he's complaining of the fact he didn't have a small goat to celebrate with his friends and the father says you have everything he's got two thirds of the estate what remains is his and he pleads with him to come into the party but the father is saying stop trying to earn my favour and come in and embrace the gift of forgiveness and this is the second way that we can be lost by thinking that we can earn a relationship with God and maybe that's you this morning maybe you're not someone who's lived a wayward rebellious life maybe you've lived an upright life for all the years of your life you're known for a good life no one has anything bad to say about you but your attitude is this that God forgives you because you're good because you deserve it and if that's you this morning



Jesus is saying to you you need to repent as well you need forgiveness also not of your outward rebellion but of your inward rebellion and the sad thing about the story of course is that whilst the younger brother is willing to come to his senses the elder brother is not and he remains outside the party and outside the home so as we close can I ask you this morning where are you in this parable are you like the younger son or the elder son whichever it is you need to come into the father and receive his forgiveness you need to come to your senses realise your sin and trust in Jesus Christ who has come to save sinners because that's why he came and my prayer for us all is that we might see that we are in this lost condition and understand that Christ has come for us if we will but come to him let us pray let us pray our Lord God how we praise you and bless you that you are a kind and merciful God that you welcome sinners thank you for that welcome that we receive by faith in Jesus Christ help us we ask to see the purpose of Jesus coming to understand to understand that he came for those who are lost and to understand what it means to be lost and to see our lostness this morning thank you that by your grace you have made a way that any who will come to Christ by faith can be forgiven and we pray that you would move in us this morning that it may be the case for us for all of us that we may be right with God through faith in Jesus Christ for those of us who know you and love you we pray that you would help us to see more of your mercy and kindness that your goodness to us would thrill our hearts once more and we pray that as we see that you'd strengthen us to serve you and help us to love you more we ask this in Christ's name amen