

HE WAS LOST AND IS FOUND

Luke 15:1-32

Key Verses: 15:31,32

"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

One day, while Jesus was preaching the good news of the kingdom of God and healing the sick, many tax collectors and prostitutes, known as public sinners, came to hear his word. The Pharisees had a strong dislike for such public sinners; they were ashamed to associate with them. But our Lord Jesus was happy to welcome them. They were also happy to be with Jesus because they felt Jesus welcomed them. After his preaching was over, these public sinners, out of thanks, invited Jesus and his company to dinner. The dinner party was literally a kind of beggars' party; but in fact it was a heavenly banquet, for where Jesus is, there is the kingdom of God. But the hypocritical Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." (1,2) Then Jesus told them three parables: First, the lost sheep (3-7); second, the lost coin (8-10); and third, the lost son (11-32). Jesus told them these parables so that they might somehow come to know the heart of God toward lost souls.

First, the parable of the lost sheep (1-7).

In the Bible, God is frequently called the Shepherd, and his people, sheep. David said in Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want..." In this passage, the lost sheep is likened to a sinner. As we know well, a sheep has rudimentary instinct and natural desires only, for he is an animal. Sheep only know where the herbage is abundant and fresh and they go along where the grass is. So there is a danger for a sheep to go astray further and further from the flock until he finds himself completely lost. Many modern people think that living naturally like sheep is very normal. But if a man lives only naturally, he becomes an "animal man." Furthermore, he becomes an object of God's wrath (Eph 2:3). Because natural man is fallen man (Ro 8:7). When God made man, he did not make man to live naturally, but to live by the word of God.

At this time, Jesus did not tell them a story one-sidedly; he spoke to them in

dialogue form. "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"(4) From a business point of view, his words sound ridiculous. Usually people think it is good to lose one sheep in order to protect ninety-nine sheep.

This kind of thinking in a democracy leads many people of the nation to be lawless. For example, a man of morality, Socrates, was poisoned to death by an immoral majority. People think a minority must follow the decisions of the absolute majority. Let's think about the way of God. The shepherd in the parable had a hundred sheep. He lost one out of a hundred. So he might well have said, "One in a hundred does not matter much; I still have the ninety-nine, haven't I?" To our surprise, the shepherd in this parable did not think that way. Rather, he left the ninety-nine in the open country and went after the lost sheep until he found it.

When Jesus told this parable, did he mean to abandon 99 sheep to find one rebellious sheep? Of course not. Jesus told this parable to teach the Pharisees the heart of God. The shepherd does not care about anything; he only cares about finding the lost sheep because the lost sheep is the same as his youngest daughter to him. This is the heart of God. When he finds his lost sheep, his joy is endless. His strength was completely renewed, even though he had not eaten for a long time in order to look for the sheep. Look at verses 5,6. "And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'" This sheep gave the shepherd enough of a hard time. Therefore, just to let him be one of the flock as before would be still generous. But the shepherd said, "Rejoice with me." It is repeated many times in this passage (6,9,32). Every human being who maintains normal human integrity can understand the joy of God's heart, for God has endowed man with inborn knowledge of God. Abraham made a great sacrifice when he had to rescue his rebellious sheep, Lot. In the movie, "Uncommon Valor," one rich father gambles his huge oil company to rescue his son, a POW in Cambodia. The father was ready to do anything to rescue his son, even if his company was ruined.

Second, the parable of the lost coin (8-10).

Jesus was happy to teach them the shepherd heart of God. So Jesus taught them another parable. Look at verse 8. "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins

and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?" This parable depicts, in general, a widow's frugal mentality. After losing their mainstay, widows have to survive in a sorrowful world. Their attachment to survive in this world cannot be exceptional. Unintentionally, they substitute money for their husbands. They say that the linings of a widow's clothes are full of greenbacks, but a widower's pockets are full of unpaid bills and a bundle of bounced checks.

It is interesting to liken a coin to a lost person. A coin is round, so it rolls and lies flat in a dark place. This coin is an allegory particularly about despaired people. This coin is an allegory about a depression maniac, because they have a habit of hiding in a dark place and drinking. These people despair, letting their lives be determined by chance. They have no resistance to the pressure of circumstances and temptation, just as the coin trundled away into some dark corner. But as a human being, to abnegate one's power of resisting circumstances is to give up one's human right, with which God has crowned each person. There is a saying: "Adverse circumstances are a fool's master and a wise man's servant." The parable of the coins teaches us that God is like a widow who spares one flock of God so preciously.

Third, the parable of the lost son (11-24).

Look at verses 11,12. "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them." The younger one wanted to get his share of the estate and use it freely. Freedom is the best gift given by God to man in the Garden of Eden (Ge 2:16,17). The father in the parable was apprehensive of danger for his son, but he did not want to treat his son like a slave, so he gave him his share of the estate.

The younger son was overcome so much by his puberty mentality to enjoy a carefree life. He ignored his father's broken heart. He could not see his father's love. As a result, when he ignored his father's love, he lost his father himself. Losing his father's love is worse than losing a house which he had bought after 20 years of toiling saving. What is worse, by losing his father's love he virtually lost himself. In the parable, the younger son wanted to handle his own money as his sinful desires directed. In this way, he rejected his father and he was not free. He was a slave of sinful desires.

Look at verse 13. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living." The younger son used up what he had received from his father only for himself. Therefore, his desire to live a wild life came from his selfishness. God gave man abundant wealth--intellect, feelings, good health and wealth, freedom of choice, and the privilege of living in God's world. One who uses God's gifts only for himself is spiritually blind. Through one-to-one Bible study, each of us must come to know God's heart.

What happened to the runaway son? After he had spent everything, he was in need. There had been so many foxy girls and gangster boys who disguised themselves that they loved the runaway boy as Brutus loved Caesar, calling him, "Mr. Prodigal Prince." But no one wanted to say, "hello," to him when his pocket was empty. In desperation, he got a job on the bottom of society; a pig-feeding job. But he received too little to support himself. One day he was so hungry that he shared the pods that the pigs were eating. But his stomach was not strong enough to digest pods like pigs. In his hunger and sorrow, his father's broken heart came across to him. He cried, "Father, now I can see your broken shepherd heart."

Look at verses 17-20a. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father." When he experienced the real world, he came to his senses. When he realized his father's love, he decided to go home. It was not a small event. For him it was a moment of coming home to his Father God. Self-realization comes when one begins to open his heart to the Father's love. At the moment he remembered his father's love, he realized that he had been wrong. Without knowing God's love, man is like an orphan who is endlessly sorrowful. Human love, even if it is parents' love, cannot substitute for God's love because it is eternal. It is indeed true. Many young people were loved by their parents to the degree they were spoiled or useless. But they are endlessly sorrowful, feeling that they were totally unloved by their parents. They feel unloved because they do not know God's love.

The climax of the parable is the father's welcome. (20b-24) The rest of the story is but scaffolding. Perhaps the son's heart sank as he came near his father's

house. No doubt he hesitated when his father's home came into sight, and perhaps all his resolution oozed out of his fingertips if, before making his appearance to his father, he had had to pass through in his rags before his father's servants and before all the people in his hometown. But he did not give up going to his father because he remembered his father's love.

Let's see what the father did then. Look at verse 20b. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." This is the exact picture of the heart of God. The son rejected his father's love. He made his father unbearably sorrowful. But the father did not remember his son's transgressions. Probably the smell of his dirty face was sweeter than honey to his father. The father's joy for his homecoming son was indeed great. It was exactly the heavenly joy. Paul, who knew the love of God, said in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

How did the son respond? Look at verse 21. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" God gave him the spirit of repentance. In verse 19b, the son wanted to ask his father to give him a job as one of his servants. When he said, "one of his hired men," he did not mean to become a servant for a paycheck every other week. He meant he was willing to serve his father with gladness and full devotion.

What was the father's reply to his son? Read verses 22,23. "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.'" The father gives no verbal answer to his son's confession. But he ordered the servants to bring the best gifts for his son. The robe, traditionally, was a familiar emblem of character. The father clothed his prodigal son in the best robe. The son was treated like a heavenly prince. The ring is a token of being an heir. This story teaches us that our God forgives our sins unconditionally and crowns each of us with the crown of the heavenly kingdom through his Son Jesus Christ.

Fourth, he was lost and is found (25-32).

The older brother came back from working in the field and heard the sounds of joyful music and dancing. He asked one of his servants, "What's going on here?"

The servant explained about the feast. Then the older son became very angry and refused to go in. He thought that his younger brother didn't deserve such a big feast. He himself worked hard and obeyed his father. Yet his father did not give him even a young goat. The older brother was quite reasonable. What he said was reasonable. But he was spiritually blind to his father's love: he only had a boss-and-employee relationship with his father. He participated neither in his father's sorrow nor in his broken heart (25-27). This older brother refers to the hypocritical Pharisees. The father said, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (31,32). According to the father, the older son's inheritance is safe. His father's possessions were all his. Furthermore, the father himself was his. Most importantly, he had a great privilege of serving his father. But he did not realize his blessed privilege. He only wanted his father's young goats for his wage.

In this passage we learn that God's love is unconditional to those who come to him. We also learn that happiness comes when we realize we are the children of God through his Son Jesus Christ.