

Luke 15:1-10

Gods Pursuit of the lost

Can anyone remember the key word from Neville's message last week?

Disciple! Following the person, Jesus. 14:33 *those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

This morning we've arrived at arguably one of the most important and pivotal chapters in Luke's gospel. It is because, in today's passage - and next week on the lost son with our guest Rob Gray - there are few passages that speak with such simplicity and clarity, on *God's heart for the lost*. Gods pursuit of the lost. The ends God is willing to go to, to find the lost.

And if that's Gods heart, it follows that ought to be our heart for people...

That's what I want us to see, hear and respond to together today...

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Isn't this an awesome passage...in summary we see 3 things:

- a. *That God is committed to finding the lost*
- b. *That God goes to great effort to find the lost*
- c. *And, that God (heaven and the angels) rejoice/s in the finding of the lost*

If that's God heart for people, that ought to be our heart for people who do not yet know Jesus as Lord

GOD IS COMMITTED TO FINDING THE LOST

Something or at least someone as the case is in the text, needs to be lost first, in order to be found. Do note the language is "lost", or "found". Not, just about lost, or marginally or nominally found

Lost = utterly destroyed, ruined, perished¹ Found = discovered after a search²

Five uses of the word "lost" in Luke and four are in Ch. 15.

The other is in Luke 19:10 "*Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost*" In Jesus' parables the term "lost" is used in relation to animals and items of significant value to their owners.

Let's revisit those verses...(v.4) "*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?... (v.6b) I have found my lost sheep.'*

(v.8) "*Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins-and loses one...* (v.9b) '*Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin....*

Everyone in this room will know what it means to 'lose' something of significant value and what that feels like. Losing your wedding ring in the ocean or, driving off from the supermarket having left your \$500 dollar iPhone on the roof

But "lost" – when it comes to people – is rather more stark and serious than that. And we will realise – in the parables – Jesus is referring those who believe and are saved, and those who do not believe and are not saved. Eternity is at stake!

And we really only get a glimpse of what this means to God and therefore the enormity of what being found (saved) means when we get to Vv. 7 & 10 where Jesus teaches there is *rejoicing in heaven and in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*.

Some of us may be uncomfortable with such stark terms as Lost and Found when it comes to describing a person's status like this³.

But the Bible is clear on this, not only in Luke 15, but throughout...

Rom. 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish⁴ (**lost**) but have eternal life.*

Furthermore, it's important we understand the seriousness of what "lost" means, so we can see two things: When we are "found", what we are "found" from? And, what God has done, and what he does in order for you to be "found", from being "lost"

God is committed to finding those who are lost.

¹ Strong's Greek: 622. ἀπόλλυμι (apollumi) -- to destroy, destroy utterly (biblehub.com)

² Strong's Greek: 2147. εὕρισκω, (heuriskō) -- to find (biblehub.com)

³ It is for this reason that terms like nominal Christian are possibly not that helpful

⁴ Strong's Greek: 622. ἀπόλλυμι (apollumi) -- to destroy, destroy utterly (biblehub.com)

If that's God's commitment to us, that's our commitment to finding the lost as well...

Turn back with me to v.1. where we first see that commitment of Jesus (God the son) – as he tended to do – placing himself in an environment surrounded by 'lost' people (sinners)

V.1: *"the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus"*

Jesus is intentional and compassionate. People gathered to hear him. He made himself available to them. He was constantly out and about amongst those who did not know him. Not only was this Jesus' heart in his ministry, he did this to demonstrate to the Pharisees and T.O.L that loving those who do not know God, in this way, is an evidence of what genuine faith in God looks like: fruit!

JTB said in Matt. 3:7-8 *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. James 2 faith without deeds is dead*

In other words, when we have been utterly captivated by Christ's love and sacrifice for us, and we fully understand what we've been saved from, and the value of his grace, the 'fruit' of "that", is a heart for the lost.

Jimmy Carter said it this way – *My faith demands – this is not optional⁵ – that I do whatever I can, whenever I can, for as long as I can, with whatever I have, to make a difference.*⁶

God is committed to finding those who are lost that's our commitment to finding the lost

Now Jesus hasn't just randomly selected these parables for no apparent reason. No, they are his response to the Pharisees' and teachers of the law attitude toward the lost.

Look again at v.2 *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

This wasn't them high-fiving Jesus as they said this. No, they were not thrilled about this at all. They kept their distance, from sinners, and they believed Jesus should do the same; why they criticised him.

"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

We know already Jesus came to what? Seek and save those who are lost. We know Jesus came for those far from the most religious of all, but those who might *in humility* choose to follow him.

⁵ Leave everything behind to follow Jesus...

⁶ Stearns, 263

And the reason Jesus *welcomed sinners and ate with them*, was to demonstrate to the Pharisees and Co precisely what Gods heart is for the lost. He's demonstrating, this is what I mean about loving others, this is what I mean about mercy and about compassion, and that invitation is for, *all people* including yourselves if would believe in me

God does not want those of us who are believers isolating ourselves from those who are not, *yet*. Especially not, on the basis we think we're better, greater, more privileged...

In fact, if we're following Jesus' lead, we're to ensure that we have a presence with those who don't know Jesus. We are the feet of the gospel. (Rom. 10:14-15) How will people hear about Jesus unless you and I are not telling them?

Apart from my bible, one of the most convicting and challenging books on my shelf at home is Richard Stearns book, *The Hole In Our Gospel*. He makes the claim that perhaps there's something missing, in our belief in the power of the gospel. Our belief it is truly Good News, for all.

We might believe that privately, and within the comfortable environment of church, but what about out there?!

No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. (Luke 11:33)

Gods call on us, is to not live in exclusivity, but to *"proclaim and embody the gospel so that others can see, hear and experience Gods love in tangible ways"*⁷

And we do so out a profound sense of gratitude and thankfulness to God for saving us, meaning we want others to have what we have.

God is committed to finding those who are lost. Not only that, thanks be to God...

GOD GOES TO GREAT EFFORT TO FIND THE LOST

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵..."

⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?

Jesus is using the examples of animals (sheep) and items (coins), but we've established, 'lost' and 'found' is far more serious when it comes to people.

⁷ Stearns, Hole In Our Gospel, 18

It just so happens as I was preparing this message Karyn had borrowed a 1500-piece puzzle from a friend, only to get to the very end, to find one piece missing. So what did we do? Turn the house upside-down, lifting up all the chairs around the table, I'm on one end of the couch, Karyn looking underneath, fished the vacuum cleaner bag out of the rubbish and went through every bit of dirt and muck in there to find it, nowhere in sight...

We're thankful – when we fessed up – our friend told us not to worry, *"it's just a piece of cardboard with a picture on it"*

As stressful and frustrating as that was, it made me think, what by comparison is my heart when it comes to people potentially lost for eternity? Which is who Jesus is referring to here, unless found.

In Jesus' 1st parable we read about a Shepherd who owns a flock of 100 sheep.

Avg. flock size 20-200. After he does his daily count, one is missing, so he leaves the 99 behind to go after it. We're not told if they're left with a friend or neighbour. I would suggest in the context, we're to imagine the Shepherd leaving them as they are, taking the risk and sprinting off to find the lost one, exposing himself to the elements and the risk of wild animals hunting him...

And he finds it, alive and unhurt...and he rejoices! More shortly...

In Jesus' 2nd parable we read about *a woman (who) has ten silver coins-and loses one*. And the rhetorical question is asked *"Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"*

10 silver coins, would have been about 10 day's wages. 1 coin, a day's wage. Whatever she may have been about to do was put immediately on hold, when she discovered the coin was lost. Her all-consuming priority was finding that one coin.

She lights up her oil lamp, sweeps the room, and searches carefully and intently until such time as she's found it. And she rejoices.

Important we understand Jesus' point is not about the Shepherd and the woman recovering lost property. His point is in **the effort** being made to go in search for what is lost. Who is the one, that God might be asking you, to leave the 99, or 9, to run off and find...because their lostness matters to God?

What similarities did we notice about the Shepherd and the woman?

They both realized there was a problem and there was a sense of urgency in dealing with it. They both involved the whole community in rejoicing, when the sheep and the coin were found, it was that big-of-a-deal!

The shepherd and the woman **never gave up**, whatever the cost, looking for the one.

God never gives up looking for the one...

Rom. 5:8 *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*

Here is Almighty God, creator of the universe, caring for the one person. God never gives up looking for the one. We're, never to give up going after the one.

What did you notice about the lost sheep and the lost coin?

They did absolutely nothing to be found. They were only found because of the efforts of the shepherd and the woman.

If you're a believer here today, be thankful to God, he has taken the initiative to reach out and find you.

How, does that put fire in you because of what God has done for you, finding you from being lost (*destroyed*) – what does that truth do in you, for your pursuit of the lost?

You can't save people, that's Jesus' work. But you can tell people, you can be the light!

"What do I do I don't know many people who don't know Jesus?" There are 100,000 when you step out that door. And the guitars, harps and pianos and angels of heaven are worshipping when one is shepherded and swept into the kingdom of God.

Folks I believe we need to ask the Lord to give us a new *empathy* and *compassion* for the lost. When we have the *empathy* and *compassion* of Jesus – which is what the Pharisees and T.O.L were confronted with for the entirety of Jesus' ministry⁸ - our eyes and our hearts see people through a redemptive lens.

That is, everyone who is lost can be found, by Jesus. When we 'see' lost people this way, it motivates us to speak about Jesus. It motivates us to pray.... because there is nothing more important and crucial on this planet than for someone to be found by Christ

What is your heart for the lost?

Now our thinking may be, this world is so dark and sin so bad and people so hard to reach *I don't know where to start...?*

Do we know what the cities that Paul visited and wrote to were like (Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, and Rome)?

⁸ And was the cause of their muttering...

Sorcery, witchcraft, every imaginable sexual thing going on, utter disdain for God.

Were they more or less godly than 2023 NZ, than Hamilton?⁹ Whatever the moral state of the world is, we must remember God knows this world, it's his world! (Ps. 24:1...) The state of the world - the ugliness of other's sin – including our own – has no bearing on our efforts to reach the lost.

We are people, who need to be found. *Where do we start?*

Ask the Lord to give us a new *empathy* and *compassion* for the lost. Make the effort, at every opportunity! We must once again 'see' lost people with *empathy* and *compassion*. ***They're the one sheep, one coin.***

Our worship, our thankfulness and gratitude to God, that he saved you and I, from being utterly lost, is, is the natural response to his grace shown to us and what causes gospel-sharing to be the natural response of our lives.

He made it possible for you to be saved, at great cost, because he is committed to finding the lost, God goes to great effort to find the lost...and so must we.

And finally...

GOD REJOICES IN FINDING THE LOST (Vv. 5, 6, 7, 9 & 10)

We see in both parables that there is celebration and rejoicing at something *precious* having first being lost, then found. Celebration and rejoicing with the Shepherd, the woman, more than that, with the friends and neighbours called in to be a part of those celebrations. Its a big deal!

⁶...*'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'* ⁷ *I tell you* *that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent...*

⁹...*'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'* ¹⁰ *In the same way, I tell you*, *there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

Now we know why we read in Luke 14:35 "*Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.*"

There are 2 groups of people in the room. Religious Leaders and, sinners and tax collectors. **What were the sinners and tax collectors hearing?**

That Gods heart is predisposed to tax collectors and sinners; the lost. And when he finds them, all of heaven rejoices over one, who **repents**.

⁹ But is this a different world? I know some of you subscribe to thinking the world is getting worse? I would simply ask is it? Things had to be pretty bad for God to flood the world, and wipe out an entire city, right? Well debate that another day. I think the world is more complex and within the plethora of religious options available today, Jesus Christ is but one, of those. We know he's the only way...

One person, repents and the guitars, harps, pianos and angels of heaven are worshipping, singing, *"praise and glory, wisdom and thanks..."*. One person, all heaven. Must be important!

What were the sinners and tax collectors hearing? That God, right now, present in the person of Jesus, is seeking you out. *"If you're the 1 person in this room of 100 people, I've come for you!"*

What were the Pharisees and T.O.L hearing?

Not what the sinners were! Because they couldn't see their own lostness. *"Not us that need to repent, no way, we're good-to-go"* No they weren't and yes they did need, to repent¹⁰! They weren't able to see *the shepherding and sweeping Grace* of Jesus staring them right in the face!

We need to see how lost¹¹ we are, or we're, to see the grace of God...

What are we hearing?

...for ourselves? For those we know who are lost?

That God is committed to finding the lost

That God goes to great effort to find the lost

That Heaven rejoice/s in the finding of the lost

Maybe you're like the 'sheep' or the 'coin'? You've heard today how much Gods wants you to be found. Our team would love an opportunity to talk more about that means for you...

If you're a disciple of Jesus, you know his grace. Commit to seeking the lost, with a new empathy, go to great effort, and join with each other and heaven when 1 person is found

Seek The Lost

¹⁰ Unlike the sheep and the coin this is the one thing people need to do. Luke 18:9 that they *"were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else..."*

¹¹ Not that there are degrees of lostness