

That Which was Lost is Found

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Luke 14 and 15, focusing on the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. It emphasizes the importance of repentance and the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. The message highlights the need for Christians to maintain their 'saltiness' by forsaking all and following Jesus wholeheartedly, seeking and saving the lost like the good shepherd. It contrasts the Pharisees' judgmental attitude with Jesus' compassionate pursuit of the lost, urging believers to have ears to hear and hearts to seek the lost.

Scripture: Luke 15:4, Luke 15:8, Luke 14:34, Isaiah 53:6, Ezekiel 34:11, Revelation 3:19, Romans 2:4, Matthew 18:12, Psalm 119:176

Topics: "Repentance", "Compassion for the Lost"

Description

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Transcript

We're in Luke chapter 14 and Luke chapter 15 this morning. We're concluding on Luke 14, moving into 15. So let's read from Luke 14 verse 34 through 15 verse 10.

Luke 14 verse 34. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to him to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. And so he spoke this parable to them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over

one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the peace which was lost.

Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And so the context you remember is that Jesus had just spoken about the need to count the cost, and if you wanted to be a true disciple, you needed to be willing to forsake all and follow him. And it's in that context, then, that he speaks about the fact that if salt has lost its flavor.

So what he is speaking about here is Christians, or those who call themselves Christians, who are not willing to forsake all. They are like salt that has lost its flavor. Salt is a stable compound, technically.

In other words, it cannot lose its flavor. Salt cannot cease to be salt. It continues to have its flavor.

So how then can salt lose its flavor? It loses its flavor when it is contaminated and diluted by external stuff, by dirt, or by something else. But salt in itself remains flavorful. And so what Jesus is suggesting here, then, is that if we are not willing to forsake all—in other words, we want to continue to mix serving him with serving ourselves, serving our families in the context of the previous passage, serving the things of the world—when we want to mix that with serving the Lord, the salt becomes diluted, and the salt no longer has its ability to be flavorful.

And remember that salt does two things. The first is it gives taste. It gives flavor to the food.

I think we all understand the importance of salt, because there's probably none of us who eat without not having a salt cellar or salt shaker on the table. These days, with COVID, they don't seem to put them in the restaurants anymore, but there's little sachets with salt. We all know that without salt, the food is pretty tasteless.

But salt also disinfects. Salt is also—we use salt to gargle with. You can use salt to pour on salt water to put onto a wound, and it disinfects.

And so the Christian has an important job in this world. The Christian is there to give spice to life—not in the worldly sense, but in the good sense, in the sense of putting meaning and the true joy and the true peace of God into life. And also, we are there to be preservative.

But if we have lost our flavor, because we have become so diluted—which is where the Church is today. We brought so much—and I'm not saying this Church, but Church in general has brought so much of the world into the Church that the Church is no longer salty. It has lost its flavor.

It has lost its purpose. It is not forsaking all, but in fact it is embracing everything that the world has to offer, everything that sin and the flesh and the devil has to offer, and trying to commingle that with the things of God, and it has lost its flavor. And Jesus says, how will that be fixed? How can you re-season the salt that has become so mixed? And obviously there is a solution.

The solution is that you somehow have to pick the little bits of salt out from all of the trash in order to regain the salt, and that of course is an impossible process. So Jesus is giving a serious warning here, and he says that you as a Christian have a purpose. If you lose your purpose because you become diluted by the things of the world, what use do you have? And he gives the answer.

It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill. You can't put that salt onto the land or just throw it out in the field, because it will kill the fertility of the soil. It will make the soil infertile.

And the same with the dunghill. You throw it on the dunghill and the dung ends up in the field, and it makes the field infertile. It has no value.

It can only be thrown away, and needs to be thrown on the road or somewhere else where it cannot further contaminate the soil. And so it is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. A serious warning to Israel in the first instance, of course, and then to us as Christians and as the church.

Are we still salty? Do we still do the job that we've been called? Because if we don't, we have no value. Then Jesus says, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, obviously, what he is saying is important.

He's saying, you need to listen to what I'm saying. But there is something more to this, because Jesus is quoting Isaiah chapter 6. This is the first time that we hear these words. And Jesus quotes the words of Isaiah many times throughout the Gospels, and the book of Acts ends with the same words.

And so it is important to understand not just the message that you need to be able to hear, but the message that is concealed in Isaiah—or not concealed, but revealed, in fact, in Isaiah. When Isaiah writes these words—in fact, they are the words of God that he writes down—and what had happened is, you remember that Isaiah sees the Lord. And the Lord says, who will I send? Who will go? And Isaiah says, I will go.

And the Lord touches his lips, purges him, the same way as the salt must be uncontaminated in order to do its job. Isaiah's lips needed to be purged by the coal from the fire if it was going to do its job. You can see the similarity in the point of purity, the need for purity in the salt, the need for purity on the lips.

And the Lord then gives Isaiah the message, and he says, here's the message, go and tell them. Hearing they will not hear, and seeing they will not see. They will not understand.

This is where Israel is at the moment. This is where Jesus finds them, as we'll see in the next chapter, as he speaks to the Pharisees again. They're not able to hear.

They're not able to understand, because God has given them over, according to Romans chapter 1, to a reprobate or a debased mind. They can no longer understand. They can no longer hear.

They can no longer see. And I'm very, very concerned that the modern Christian church is in exactly the same place. And you'll remember, almost every week, we're speaking about the similarities between Israel and the church, and the fact that Israel represents the church in a sense, and that we need to learn from Israel.

And the same way as God comes to a place where he is no longer speaking to Israel, he has now come to a place, I believe, that he is no longer speaking to many churches. Obviously, the true church he is still speaking to, the true Israel, even in Isaiah's time, God was still speaking to them. But people are not hearing.

You can preach the gospel. You can preach the message. And I see this daily on YouTube, as people watch the message, and their comments indicate not only did they not hear, but they will contradict the word of God.

Not my words, but the word of God, because they cannot hear. They cannot see. They cannot understand.

And Jesus says, if you have ears, you need to hear. If there is something of the Spirit of God still working in your heart, you need to listen. Because if salt has lost its flavor, what use is it? Then in the next chapter, we find that Luke is comparing the sinners and the religious people again.

And so it says that the tax collectors, and you'll see the connection between the salt and this passage, that the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to hear him. I love those words, they drew near. Remember in the Old Testament, God wants to speak to Israel, and Israel doesn't draw near to God.

Israel flees from the presence of God at Mount Sinai. But then it says that Moses drew near to the presence of God, but Israel stood afar off. Israel drew near, sorry, Moses drew near, but Israel stood afar off.

And here we have exactly the same situation. The tax collectors and the sinners drew near, but the Pharisees are standing afar off. Where are you this morning? Are you drawing near to him, or are you standing at a distance, just watching what is going on? Remember later on in Exodus, it speaks about the fact that Moses meets with God in the tent of meeting outside of the camp.

And when he would go there to meet with God, it says that every Israelite would stand at his tent door and they would watch Moses as he goes in to speak with God. And they would watch Moses as he would come out. They were spectators, but Moses was having a relationship with God.

And you remember there was another young man there who stayed in the presence of God. Are you just watching others go into God's presence, or are you drawing near to him this morning? And notice it's the tax collectors and the sinners. We've spoken about the tax collectors before, and I'm not going to go into that in much detail, but remember that they were the most despised of all people in Israel.

Not only had they sold their loyalty to the nation to become agents of the Roman Empire, but they crooked and cheated their own countrymen. And so their gifts could not be accepted by the synagogue or in the temple. They were rejected from every part of Jewish life because they were so vile.

They could not bring testimony in a court of law because by definition they were liars, and yet they draw near to Jesus. The sinners, well, these were just all kinds of people, prostitutes, adulterers, thieves, murderers, robbers, all of the dregs of society drew near to hear him. Notice those words, to hear him.

Where did we end? And this is why we must be careful of reading a chapter at a time, because if you go back to the previous verse in the previous chapter, he who has ears let him hear. Now in chapter 5 verse 1, the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to hear him. So who had ears? The tax collectors and sinners.

Who didn't have ears? The Pharisees and the scribes. Because verse 2 says, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. Can you see the difference? One group is listening.

Another group is criticizing. Where are you this morning? Are you hearing God? Or are you so busy finding fault with everybody else that you cannot hear the voice of God? You cannot see the grace of God in operation as Jesus now deals with these sinners. And of course, he's going to tell us the next three parables against this particular, this specific setting.

They were not rejoicing over the sinners coming to Jesus, but they were criticizing Jesus for accepting the sinners. And so the Pharisees and the scribes complained, saying, this man receives sinners and he eats with them. Notice he receives them.

He receives them. They did not receive Jesus. They rejected Jesus, but the sinners received Jesus and Jesus received them.

Jesus eats with the sinners, but the Pharisees are just watching and complaining. Now, Ezekiel speaks about these men because they are the shepherds of Israel. And in Ezekiel, and I'm just going to select, take selected verses from Ezekiel chapter 34, a passage which we should know well, because he is speaking not just to the shepherds of Israel, but he's speaking to the shepherds of the church today.

And he says, the word of the Lord came to me saying, son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, thus says the Lord God to the shepherds, woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves, should not the shepherds feed the flocks. Verse five, and so they, the sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the beasts of the field. When they were scattered, my sheep wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill.

Yes, my flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth and no one was seeking or searching for them. Can you see how this applies to this setting in Luke 15? Jesus is seeking the sinners. The shepherds of Israel were not seeking them.

In fact, they were pushing them away. My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth and no one was seeking or searching for them. Thus says the Lord God, behold, I am against the shepherds and I will require my flock at their hand.

I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more for I will deliver my flock from their mouths that they may no longer be food for them. Verse 11, for that says the Lord God. Indeed, I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out.

And this is where Jesus comes in. He is now seeking the sheep. The shepherds, the Pharisees and the scribes were standing there criticizing, but Jesus was seeking the sheep.

Verse 12, as a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out my sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloud, day and dark day. And then verse 23 says, I will establish one shepherd over them and he shall feed them, my servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd.

Now, remember that when Ezekiel is writing, David had been dead for 500 years already. So, clearly this is not referring to David the king, but it's referring to Jesus who would be the son of David, who would come to sit on the throne of David. David, remember, was a shepherd and Jesus called himself the great shepherd.

And so, Jesus is the David that Ezekiel is speaking about. And he says, he will feed the sheep and he will be their shepherd. Verse 24, and I the Lord will be their God and my servant David, a prince among them, I the Lord have spoken.

And so, here in Luke 15, Jesus is fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy. He is the shepherd who is gathering the lost sheep of Israel. The shepherds have been rejected, the scribes and the Pharisees, they're just standing

there.

They're scattering. They're trying to drive people away from Jesus, but Jesus is drawing the sinners to himself. Now, Jesus speaks three parables and we're going to look this morning at the first two and we'll look at the last one the next week.

Now, remember that interpreting parables is difficult, but there are certain principles. And one of the principles is that many times parables, the rabbis speak about the parables as being pearls on a string. There is a, there may be three, sometimes even five, six parables that are the pearls.

But there is a string that runs through all of them and holds them together. And so, here we have three parables. The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost son.

We call it the prodigal son. Three parables, three pearls, but there is a single string of truth that runs through all three parables. And so, they must be read and understood and interpreted together.

As I said, we just don't have the time to deal with all three this morning and I really want to spend more time on the parable of the prodigal son because it has many other truths as well. But the central truth is that which is lost has been found. That which is lost has been found.

And so, the first parable, what man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? Now remember, Jesus is the good shepherd. This man in the parable is pretty well off. A hundred sheep those days would be—you may not have been rich, but you certainly were in the upper-middle class in terms of finances.

A hundred sheep was a lot. And one out of the hundred—and if you've been to school, you know that one out of a hundred is one percent. So, how much difference does one percent make? Well, we say it's not a big deal.

One percent is really nothing. In any calculation, we would generally discard one percent as being insignificant. But to the shepherd, that one percent was not insignificant, because he loved that sheep.

He loved not just that sheep, but all his sheep. There's a difference between these two parables, the parable of the sheep and the coins. The ratio between what was lost and which was still there in the coins was much bigger.

So, one out of ten was lost. That's ten percent. Ten percent becomes statistically and financially, I guess, significant.

Nobody wants to lose ten percent, but we can easily afford to lose one percent. And so, Jesus is highlighting the fact that it is—in this first parable, he's highlighting the fact that it is not just the value, but it is the love of the shepherd that is important. That one out of the hundred was not that significant.

And the Pharisees looked at these sinners and they said, well, these people don't count. No, it's not what value they attach to them. It's not how important these sinners and tax collectors were.

It was the love of the shepherd for them that was the issue. And so, what man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness? Now, remember that when he loses one, it's not because he was a bad shepherd, but because sheep are prone to going astray. Isaiah 53, we all as sheep have gone astray.

We've turned everyone to his own way. So, sheep go astray. That's just what sheep do.

And it was only when, probably that evening, when he gathered them together in the place where they were going to sleep, and he counted them, that he realized one was missing. And it says he leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness. It's interesting that Luke specifies in the wilderness.

So, were they not at risk of wolves and lions and other animals? Yes, they were. But his love for each one superseded his fear for the rest. And he was trusting that the ninety-nine would somehow be able just to huddle together and stay safe.

But he could not afford to let the one go. He had to go and find it. And I want you to see that it says he goes after the one which is lost until he finds it.

This is not just a cursory look around. Oh, let me have a look. Oh, no, he's not there.

He's not there. Okay, let's move on. No, he looks and he seeks until he finds it.

Until he finds it. And I'm so grateful for the grace of God that seeks us out until he finds us. There's a famous piece of prose called *The Hound of Heaven*.

And it speaks about God hunting down, as it were, not in a negative sense, but hunting down the sinner until he finds him and is able to bring him home. I thank God for his grace in my life, who hunted me down, who sought me year after year after year for sixteen years. As a young boy, I rejected him.

I didn't come to him. But he sought me. He pleaded with me until he found me.

And even after, I still go astray. But I thank God for his grace that he continues to seek me. And he continues to seek us until he finds us.

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. I have in my office a picture painted by someone a long time ago. I've forgotten the name of the artist.

The one I have was a copy in pencil done for me by Tim Addison. And that picture is very significant and important to me. It's important because as I was growing up as a young boy, my grandfather had the same picture—not the one drawn by Tim, but done by the original artist, a print of the original—in his study.

And whenever I went to go and visit my grandfather, I can clearly remember the picture hanging by the door. And every time I would look at the picture—and of course, my grandfather's study was an amazing place with hundreds of books and pictures and memorabilia from different parts of Africa where he had preached as an evangelist and as a missionary. But the thing that stands out that I can remember—and I don't remember any of the other things in detail, but I remember this picture because I would stand still as a young boy and look at that picture of the shepherd reaching down and picking up the sheep that he had found.

And every time my grandfather would tell me the story how that Jesus is the good shepherd—goes out and seeks those that are lost and finds them and brings them home. And so Jesus says that he found it, and when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, carries it because it's maybe weary, tired, maybe even wounded. He puts it on his shoulders, and he carries it home.

But he's rejoicing because that which was lost was found. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. And so there's great rejoicing.

And Jesus says, I say to you likewise, verse 7, there will be more joy in heaven, more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 just persons who need no repentance. More joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. I want you to see that word, repents.

Today our emphasis is on a sinner who makes a decision, who prays the sinner's prayer, who signs a decision card, who makes some kind of confession that he believes in Jesus. No, what he is looking for is repentant sinners, sinners who turn away from their sin, who turn away from their evil lifestyle. The church is full of people today who say they believe, but they've never repented.

They've never turned away from sin. They continue in sin that grace may abound. But he rejoices over one sinner who repents more than over 99 just persons who need no repentance.

Now, does that mean that he's not happy about the others who already come home? No, obviously he's happy about all who've come to repentance. But I believe that what Jesus is doing is he's being sarcastic, because he's—remember, the Pharisees and the scribes are standing there, and they're watching him. And what Jesus, in fact—because remember, Jesus elsewhere said that those who are healthy don't need a physician.

And what Jesus is saying is, these guys, they don't need to repent because they're just. But they're not just, but they think they're just. And sadly, again, there are so many in churches today who think that they're just, who think they don't need to repent, don't understand that they're sick.

Or as Revelation said, don't you know that you're wretched and miserable, poor, blind, and naked, needing to repent. There's no rejoicing over the Pharisees. There's no rejoicing over the hypocrites.

There's no rejoicing over those who are self-sufficient and self-made. But even if one of those came to repentance, there would be great rejoicing in heaven. And then he tells the second parable of what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it.

Now, as I said earlier, this loss is much bigger. First of all, because I don't know what the value of a sheep would have been those days, but it would have been worth much more than a silver coin. So the man had a lot more.

These silver coins would be—ten coins would be ten days' wages. Now remember, when you're living hand-to-mouth, as this woman probably was, there was—to save ten coins, to save ten days, basically two weeks' worth of wages, would have been very, very hard. This was her retirement, almost.

This was everything she had. And she loses one of the ten, and she lights a lamp, and she sweeps the house. Remember, the houses of those days didn't have windows or electric lights.

They just had a door, and there'd be a little bit of light coming in, so you needed a lamp to be able to look. And this is just—by the way, those who—if you lose something, this is good practical advice. Every now and then I lose a screw or something in my shop, and I do exactly this.

I get the flashlight, and I get the broom, and I begin to sweep, and I begin to clean until I find the screw or the part that I was looking for. So some things haven't changed in 2,000 years. And so she begins in one corner, and she works her way through until she finds it.

Now, I want you to see the similarity again. Let's go back. Verse 4. He leaves them, and he goes after the one which is lost until he finds it.

So Jesus is making a statement, and he says that is what he does. Now, when it comes to the woman, he says—or rather, he puts it in the form of a question. He says, doesn't this make sense? Is this not what you would do? That a woman having ten loses one, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds it.

Jesus is saying, this is just the right thing to do. This is the logical thing to do. But just obviously to the Pharisees and the scribes, it wasn't logical at all.

It didn't make any sense to them. These people were—they'd written them off. But she seeks until she finds it.

And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the peace which I lost. Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. So let me ask you the questions this morning.

First of all, are you being salt? Or has your saltiness been diluted by the things of the world? Let me remind you what we said last week, and that is that you need to forsake all, that you may be his disciple. You need to be willing to lose all, that you might be pure, and that you might have ears to hear. Are you hearing today? Or have you become dull of hearing like Israel of old, like the scribes and the Pharisees who could not hear? They heard, but they didn't hear.

They saw, but they didn't see. Can you really hear? Have you entered into the ministry of the Lord Jesus? Jesus says, This is my purpose. I've come to seek and to save what is lost.

Are you seeking to save what is lost? Or are you like the Pharisees, criticizing, judging, more concerned about technicalities than about souls? Have you entered, and have we as a church, entered into the ministry of the Lord Jesus of looking for that one? You see, here's the problem, is that in modern evangelism, we're not concerned about ones. We want tens. We want hundreds.

We want thousands. Just look at the big campaigns. They count in thousands.

Jesus doesn't count in thousands. He counts in ones, because every single individual is important. Is there someone in your family, someone in your friend, amongst your friends, that is lost and that needs to be found? Have you gone after that one? And I'm not meaning in the sense of being a pest or being a a frustrating them with your preaching, but have you gone after them with love, with care, with concern, trying to find them or find them for God or finding God for them, if you will, bringing them back into the fold? Now, I understand that there are many who don't want to come back.

I understand there are many who are lost who don't want to be found. And that's what the next parable teaches us, is that the father does not go out looking for the prodigal son because he knows the son is not in a place to hear. He has to wait until the son is ready to come back.

And sometimes we have to do that, but we need to understand the difference. There are some that we need to go after. There are others that we just need to pray and wait and look for the day that they will return.

Are you seeking and saving or are you judging and criticizing? Father, we pray that you'd help us to be like Jesus in every way. Lord, help us to be like him in our attitude to those that are lost. Lord, it's so easy to become self-righteous and judgmental about everything that's wrong in the church and everything that's wrong with Christians and people around us, just like the Pharisees.

But Lord, it's so hard sometimes to have to put on hold our agenda that we might seek and save that which is lost. Lord, I pray that you'd help us to be a soul-seeking church—not a seeker-friendly church, but a soul-seeking church, a church that is seeking those that are lost and bringing them back on our shoulders. Lord, that there may be rejoicing in heaven, that there may be rejoicing amongst us over those ones and those twos that come to the Lord Jesus.

Lord, I do rejoice over those that you have saved in these last couple of years. Lord, they're not many, but your grace is still evident. Your door of grace is still open.

And Lord, you're still in the business of saving souls. And Lord, we rejoice over those who are saved. And so, Lord, we pray that you'd help us to have your heart, help us to have hearing ears, help us to be salt.

In Jesus' name I pray. I pray that you'd go with us, keep us, protect us, bring us together again safely next time, I pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

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