

“PORTRAITS OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE (#5):
LOST AND FOUND”

(Luke 15:1-7)

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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 4-10-11 AM]

-I-

1. Read Text: Luke 15:1-7 and Pray.
2. Feeling lost is a terrible feeling.

A—And probably every one of us here this morning has experienced feeling lost at some point in their life.

1—Oh, it may have been as a child getting lost from your parents at a Mall or a Department Store.

2—Or perhaps it was as you were driving your car in the city or in the country.

3—Or perhaps even you simply felt perplexed and confused about a decision or direction in your life.

B—*Some* people go through life feeling spiritually and emotionally “lost” *all* the time.

C—But probably *all* of us have felt “lost” in *some* way at *some* point in our life.

3. So, today as we continue our series Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, I want us to use the various parables that Jesus shares in Luke 15 to talk about four ways that we can find ourselves lost in life.

-II-

4. First of all, we can get **lost simply by wandering off.**

A—In the *PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP* from Verses 4-7, the one lamb that was lost didn't mean to get lost – it wasn't its intention to separate itself from the shepherd.

B—You see, sheep are naturally prone to go astray:

1—They don't deliberately do so, but instead, they become lost as they eat.

2—They get to nibbling on the grass w/their heads down, and it tastes so good that when they finish off the grass where they are, they simply move on to the next patch of grass they see, never paying attention either to where they are, where they're going, or where they've been.

3—And before they know it, their unintentional carelessness has caused them to wander away from the shepherd and from the rest of the fold.

C–Isaiah 53:6 says that “*All we like sheep have gone astray; We have all turned to our own way.*”

1–Perhaps that's why Jesus calls us sheep, and why he calls himself “*the Good Shepherd*”: because we often wander and stray from God unintentionally.

2–You see, what happens is that we get so involved with the busy routines of daily life that, without realizing it, like those sheep, we move from one attractive fad to another, moving farther and farther from Christ.

4–We move without paying attention to where we are or where we are going, until eventually we lose our way.

D–Oh, we don't mean to get lost, but in our busy-ness and carelessness...

1–...In our inattentiveness to our own spiritual lives (i.e., by not taking time to pray, read the Bible, or attend church with God's family),...

2–...we wake up and discover a distance from God, and a coldness to our relationship with Him – we can get lost, you see, simply by wandering off.

5. A second way we can be lost is **through the influence of others.**

A–In the *PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN* in Verses 8-10 (not read), notice that the coin didn't lose itself– it wasn't responsible for its lostness; someone *else* caused it to be lost.

B–This reminds us of how powerfully we affect and influence each other – people can be either lost or found because of us and because of our influence on them.

C–You see, in a world today which says that the only person we should look after is ourselves, Jesus here is saying the exact opposite: that we *do* have a great responsibility for *others* – after all, “*no one is an island.*”

1–And so we need to ask ourselves: By our actions, words, and behaviors, are we causing people to be lost or helping them to be found?

2–Perhaps you've heard it said that...
“Some people cause happiness WHEREver they go, while other people cause happiness WHENever they go.”

3–You see, our behavior & conduct can either turn people *on* to, or *away from* Christ.

6. A third way that we can get lost is **by arrogantly and intentionally choosing to run away.**

A–Verses 11-24 (not read) tell what's often called the *PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON*, where we find the younger son tired of life in his Father's house.

1—He wanted something new, exciting, and adventurous. And so he goes looking for life and love in all the wrong places.

2—And while he’s often criticized for the various “sinful” things he does, the reality that all these things are merely symptoms of a deeper sin: the “sin” of not wanting to be the child and brother he was created to be; his real “sin,” in effect, was in rejecting his family.

B—Well, God *our* Father created each of *us* to be His children, which means that (whether we like it or not), we’re sisters and brothers to each other – we’re God’s family.

C—And so, anytime that by our words or actions we reject others who are not like us and try to live self-sufficient lives, then we’re rejecting our own identity as a part of God’s family

1—Unfortunately we in the church often think of the prodigal son as representative of people *outside* the church.

2—But I’ve known just as many “prodigals” *inside* the church as *outside* it.

D—...Because anytime that we arrogantly and intentionally reject our family or try to live self-sufficient lives, then *we* (like the prodigal) are *also* in the far country.

7. A fourth way we can find ourselves lost is **through bitterness or resentment.**

A—Notice the Parable of the Prodigal Son is *also* A STORY ABOUT THE OLDER BROTHER who stayed home (Verses 25-32 = hence “*The Parable of the Man with Two Sons*”)

B—It’s a story about a father who had two sons...

1--Who loved both of them,...

2--Who, when they came to him, went out to meet them both (Vs. 20,28),...

3--And who was generous to both of them (Vs. 22-23,31).

4--But who each responded to his love and generosity in very different ways: one with repentance and remorse; the other with bitterness and resentment.

C—Oh, it wasn't that the older brother didn't want the younger to return – it was the *party* for him that was so offensive!

1—“*Sure, let the penitent come home! But keep his homecoming in character with true Jewish tradition: Give him bread and water to eat; a sackcloth to wear; ashes to adorn himself; let him kneel and grovel in penitence at his father's feet; let there be tears of remorse and repentance!*”

2—Instead, what does the father do? He kills the prized fatted calf; gives him “*a robe –the best one*” to wear; He gives him rings to adorn his fingers; He calls *not* for kneeling, but for *dancing*; and instead of tears, there’s merriment!

D—Oh, the scandal of it all was just too much for the older brother!

1—He felt angry, sullen, and hurt at the celebration for this person who he couldn't even call “*brother*,” but instead could only call “*this son of yours*” (Vs.30).

2--You see, he let all of his anger and hurt turn into bitterness and resentment which cut him off from his father *and* his brother, causing him to miss the party.

E—How many of us today as Christians are missing God's party because we're so bound-up by bitterness and resentment that we're harboring towards someone – a spouse or family-member, a co-worker, friend, church member, a pastor, maybe even God?

F—Scholar I.H. Marshall is right when he says that “*One can be lost even [while still] at home*,” because we can get lost through bitterness and resentment.

–III–

8. And yet, even though these parables are stories about getting lost, they are, more importantly, also stories about being found.

A—They teach us that...

1—Even when we, like **the lost sheep**, *carelessly and unintentionally wander away*,...

2—Even when we, like **the lost coin**, are *led astray through the influence of others*,...

3—Even when we, like **the prodigal son**, *arrogantly and intentionally run away from God and reject our family*,...

4—And even when we, like **the older son**, are *lost through bitterness & resentment*...

B—...God seeks us out diligently and relentlessly until we are found again.¹

9. Above all else, you see, God desires to bring each of us back from the “far countries” and “far places” that we have either intentionally or unintentionally wandered or strayed into.

A—And as in each of these stories, when we're found, he throws a party in honor.

B—As God's children, each and every one of us are invited to come and share in this great celebration – how we respond to that invitation is up to us.

10. Being lost is a *terrible* feeling,... But being found is a *wonderful* feeling. Whatever “lost place” you may be in today, I invite you to open your heart and let God find you.

11. [PRAYER: (*Invitation to accept God's “finding” of us by accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord...*)]

12. [Suggested Traditional service closing hymn: #248, Softly and Tenderly]

ENDNOTES:

1. John Wesley (founder of Methodism) called this “Prevenient Grace” – grace that comes before we ever even knew it. It's grace that enables us to say, “*Oh, how I love Jesus because he first loved me.*”