

Seeking the Lost

Luke 15:1-7 Parable of the Lost Sheep

Introduction

It's so easy for Christians to deviate and become preoccupied with their own comfort, and become indifferent, apathetic, callous and self-centered. Many believers have lost the passion for the lost precious souls. Many are not seeking the lost – to care for them and love them into the kingdom of God.

Jeremiah, looking at lost people, says, "*Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of my people.*" Here is a man who says, "*I don't have enough tears to carry out my sorrow. I wish I had more tears to carry the sorrow that fills my head*" (Jer. 9:1).

This stirs my heart, and I'm praying that God would continue to give me a passion for the lost.

The passion of John Wesley, for example, also stirs me. He went out to do for England more than was done by the armies and the navies of England in his lifetime. He had tremendous courage. He toiled beyond what was rational. He parted company with ease and comfort. And as for money, he lived as a poor man. He lived on a pittance and gave away more than \$200,000. He traveled about 350,000 km., mostly on foot and horseback, and preached 2,400 different sermons.

And amid misrepresentation and abuse, never knowing the delights of love at home, subject to incessant attacks of the mob, and the press, he never abated the joy of his heart and the hope in his ministry until he reached the age of 88. And he ended his ministry at his death, and not before.

Cannon Ferrar said of Wesley, "Overwhelming evidence exists to show that the Church and people of England in his day were dull, vapid, and soulless, and the preaching was careless. The land was steeped in immorality. And to Wesley was granted the task for which he was set apart by enviable consecration...the task which even an archangel might have envied him of awakening a mighty revival of religious life in those dead pulpits, in those slumbering churches, and in that moribund society." And it was said of Wesley he was out of breath pursuing souls.

We don't identify much with that. We are content with comfort. We are content with personal prosperity. The lifesaving enterprise of the Church means little, if anything, to too many Christians.

When you look at Christ, you have to see Him as the one who came to seek and to save the lost. He had a passion and a drive to seek those who were lost, harassed and living in darkness. If we are to walk as He walked then we must understand his concern for the lost.

Context of Luke 15:1-7

Jesus always sought the lost precious souls. He never waited for people to come to him but he always sought them.

In Luke 15 we find Jesus traveling through the countryside near Jerusalem and many people were following Him. At one point some tax collectors and "sinners" were gathering around to hear Him. Some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law complained to Jesus that He was welcoming and hanging around with outcasts and sinners (Luke 14:25; 15:1).

Verse 1 "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus."

-All the tax collectors and "*sinners*" were coming to Christ to listen to Him.

-There is a certain attraction about Christ. People were drawn to Him!

-How come? I believe He was not a threat to them.

-Christ's compassion for the sinner must have been quite evident – in His manner, in His dealings with the lost.

-Why didn't Christ pose himself as a threat? He didn't intimidate people.

-There was a genuine and sincere concern in Christ for the lost, and people sensed it and saw it in His disposition and demeanor.

-Christ truly loved the sinner, not the sin.

Matthew 9:36 *“And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.”*

-This verse truly capsulizes Christ's attitude toward the lost was one of deep compassion; and this attracted people to Christ, especially the lost.

Verse 2 “But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

-The reaction of the religious Pharisees and scribes. They muttered, grumbled and indignantly complained.

-Jesus' association with these tax-gatherers and sinners was a deplorable thing to the religious leaders. These were people the Pharisees despised and rejected. They were the scum of society.

-The Pharisaic regulations laid it down quite explicitly against a tax-collector:

1. You entrust no money to him.
2. Take no testimony from him.
3. Trust him with no secret.
4. Do not appoint him guardian of an orphan.
5. Do not make him the custodian of charitable funds.
6. Do not accompany him on a journey.

-Obviously, they were shocked to the core to see Jesus consorting with such people.

-The Pharisees looked sadistically forward not to the saving but to the destruction of the sinner.

-Luke 5:30-31 *“But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*

“This man welcomes sinners.” Greek word for welcome is *prosdechetai*: which means to receive willingly and openly.

-Again we see that Christ is non-threatening to sinners, they feel welcomed by him.

Christ's attitude – compassion. Christ's motive – to save them.

-There is a word of caution here to Christians, who can easily have the pharisaic attitude toward the lost. Let's be careful not to look down at the lost.

Verse 3 “Then Jesus told them this parable:”

Because of the self-righteous and prejudice views of the Pharisees, Jesus told them the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus often used parables to convey a deep spiritual in a story that could be understood.

Verse 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?”

“Suppose one of you.” Jesus draws the listeners into the parable. He has them identify with the story.

In the Bible people are often referred to or likened to as sheep. Here are a few Scripture passages.

-Psalm 79:13 “So we your people and the sheep of your pasture will give thanks to Thee forever.”
-Isaiah 53:6 “All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each one of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

Characteristics of Sheep

1. Easily stray away and get lost

1 Peter 2:25 “For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.”

2. Sheep are helpless

Without the assistance of the shepherd the sheep are helpless.

Matthew 9:36 “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Lost sheep: sinner who is lost and needs to repent.

Ninety-nine sheep: righteous persons that are not lost.

Verses 5 & 6 “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.’”

The Tender Shepherd

In Scripture the Lord is portrayed as a Shepherd who tenderly cares for His people.

Isaiah 40:11 “Like a Shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.”

Psalm 23:1-2 “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.”

-The Lord never abandons those He loves.

-Finding the lost is a joyful experience and it overshadows everything else.

-In the shepherd’s overflowing happiness he calls in others to share his joy.

Verse 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.”

-Jesus is emphasizing, both by parable and direct statement, that His seeking and receiving sinners greatly pleases God.

-The climax of the story is not only the return of the sheep but the triumphant rejoicing in its rescue. Heaven reverberates with joy!

Heaven: a reverent way to refer to God without saying His name.

Conclusion

-In this parable we learn that God does not wait passively for sinners to come to Him, but actively seeks them out. God pursues the lost.

-The great Jewish scholar, C. G. Montefiore, saw in this parable a distinctive and revolutionary concept: God actively seeks out sinners and brings them home. The rabbis agreed that God would welcome the penitent sinner. But it is a new idea that God is a seeking God, a God who takes the initiative.

Ezekiel 34:11, “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.”

-People may give up hope on a sinner; not so with God. God loves those who never stray away; but in His heart there is a joy of joys when one is found and comes home.

According to new research from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity one out of five non-Christians in North America does not "personally know" a single follower of Christ. That's 13,447,000 people who don't have a Christian friend or even acquaintance. The percentages get higher for certain religious groups. For instance, 65 percent of Buddhists, 75 percent of Chinese people, 78 percent of Hindus, and 43 percent of Muslims in America do not personally know a follower of Christ.

Worldwide, the numbers are much worse: more than 8 in 10 non-Christians do not personally know a follower of Christ.

Todd M. Johnson, one of the researchers for the study, said that relatively small gestures—like inviting families into your home for Thanksgiving dinner—can have a bigger impact than huge mission campaigns. Johnson said, "You should really have lifelong friendships with Hindus, Buddhists, and so on. It's so simple, and yet it becomes a great deal." (Source: *Abby Stocker, "The Craziest Statistic You'll Read About North American Missions," Christianity Today 8-19-13*).

Our mission, as Christians is to seek the lost with compassion. "When He [Jesus] saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Let's follow Christ's example – have compassion for the lost.