

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Parable of the Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10

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Scripture

We are studying chapter 15 in *The Gospel of Luke*. It is a marvelous chapter as Jesus explains the good news of salvation in the parable of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. Kenneth E. Bailey notes, “For hundreds of years the Latin tradition has called this parable *Evangelium in Evangelio* (the gospel within the gospel), and so it is.”¹

Jesus preached the good news of salvation to all people. However, the religious people of his day, the Pharisees and the scribes, rejected his teaching, whereas the irreligious people of his day, the tax collectors and sinners, embraced his teaching.

The religious Pharisees and the scribes believed that Jesus was wrong to teach the irreligious people about the good news of salvation. Their attitude toward the irreligious was summed up in a later rabbinic saying, “Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him to the Law.”² But Jesus had previously responded to the criticism of the religious people in Luke 5:31-32, when he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” In addition, in the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:12-24) Jesus declared that he would declare God’s invitation to irreligious people rather than to religious people who rejected it.

In Luke 15 Jesus gives the highest reason of all for proclaiming the good news of salvation to all, including the irreligious. D. A. Carson expresses it this way, “God rejoices over the recovery of a lost sinner, and therefore it is Jesus’ supreme de-

¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.

² D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1005.

sire to seek and save the lost (19:10).”³ The parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son in Luke 15 is the most beautiful illustration in all of Scripture about God’s joy over the recovery of lost sinners. Each time the lost object is found, there is a call to celebrate its recovery. And as Carson notes, “In just the same way, it is implied, the Pharisees should share in God’s rejoicing over the salvation of the outcasts.”⁴

But, sadly, the Pharisees and the scribes do not rejoice over the salvation of the outcasts. This three-part parable in Luke 15 is directed to the Pharisees and the scribes. We have already examined the first part of the parable, the lost sheep. Today, we will examine the second part of the parable, the lost coin.

Let’s read the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10, although, for the sake of context, I shall read verses 1-3:

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: . . . ⁸ **“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**
(Luke 15:8-10)

Introduction

The film *Finding Nemo* is an animated story of a father’s resolute search for his son. The father, a fish named Marlin, teams up with another fish named Dory to find Nemo. A dentist

³ D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed., 1005.

⁴ D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed., 1005.

captured Nemo while diving off the coast of Sydney, Australia and placed him in a fish tank in his office.

Nemo thinks his father has forgotten about him and that he'll never see him again. But one day a pelican named Nigel lands in the window of the dentist's office and begins to tell Nemo an amazing story.

"Nemo! Your father's been fighting the entire ocean looking for you!" reports Nigel.

"My father?" Nemo incredulously asks.

"Oh, yeah! He's been battling sharks and jellyfish," Nigel recounts.

"It's my dad! He took on a shark!" Nemo exclaims proudly.

Nigel says, "I heard he took on three."

Nemo is dumbfounded. He repeats, "Three?"

Nigel explains, "You see, kid. After you were taken, your dad started swimming like a maniac. He took on three sharks. He battled an entire jellyfish forest. Now he's riding a bunch of sea turtles on the east Australian current, and the word is he's headed this way right now to Sydney."

"What a great daddy!" Nemo says.⁵

His father finds Nemo. And there is great joy.

All three parts of the parable in Luke 15 make the same basic point. In each story something is lost, sought, found, and celebrated.

According to Michael Wilcock, "The plain meaning of the chapter is that just as there is joy when any shepherd or any housewife or any father recovers a loss, so there is joy in heaven when a sinner is reunited with God."⁶

Philip Ryken expresses it this way, "This three-in-one parable is about the joy of God in finding what is lost – a joy

⁵ *Finding Nemo* (Walt Disney/Pixar, 2003), rated G, directed and written by Andrew Stanton.

⁶ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 149-150.

that we will share only if we have the heart that Jesus has for lost and dying sinners.”⁷

The first two parts of the parable in Luke 15 are about a lost sheep and a lost coin. They are virtually identical and are often examined together. However, there are important differences too.

So, today we shall examine the second part of the parable about a lost coin that a woman seeks, finds, and rejoices over its recovery.

Lesson

The analysis of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10 teaches us that there is joy in heaven over every sinner who repents.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Woman’s Search (15:8)
2. The Woman’s Success (15:9a)
3. The Woman’s Celebration (15:9b-10)

I. The Woman’s Search (15:8)

First, let’s look at the woman’s search.

Jesus continued telling the Pharisees and the scribes the second part of the parable in verse 8, **“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?”**

It is important to understand the context of the parable. Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem from Galilee. He was just a few short months away from his death by crucifixion. On his journey to Jerusalem he passed through village after village. Each

⁷ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 104.

village had many dozen people who were bound together in a tight community of family and friends. Kenneth Bailey makes the following comment about the woman's house:

Simple one-room village homes were about the size of an American one-car garage. Windows were really only ventilation slits in the walls, approximately three inches high and located some seven feet off the ground. The poor used flat stones of basalt for flooring while large slabs of basalt stretched from arch to arch to form the ceilings. Faced with walls, floor, and a ceiling constructed of black stone, and with almost no light from three-inch ventilation slits, it is little wonder the woman had to light a lamp and search diligently for her coin.⁸

Jesus said that the woman had **ten silver coins**, and she lost **one coin**. A **silver coin** was a day's wages for a laborer. It is likely that the **ten silver coins** were given to the woman by her husband to provide for the family for a week or two. She may have tied the coins up in a cloth but the knot worked loose and a coin fell out. She knew that the coin was in the house because she had not been outside. And so she lit a lamp and swept the house and sought diligently until she found the coin.

Bailey makes an interesting observation. He says, "The lost sinners Jesus was receiving were in the house of Israel, not in a far country. They were a part of the 'wealth' of the nation and could be found. If Jesus' critics would seek diligently they too could find the lost."⁹ The Pharisees and the scribes – the religious people – believed that the way to come into a right relationship with God was through obedience to his law. In other words, they were saved because of their performance. But, they did not realize that they were not able to keep God's law

⁸ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 87.

⁹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*, Second Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005), 35.

fully and perfectly. They needed to turn from their sin in repentance and trust in Jesus' perfect obedience to cover their unrighteousness. And that is the message that all sinners needed – and still need to this day – to believe in order to be found.

Some have asked why Jesus told a story about a woman. Jesus could have told a parable about a *man* who lost a coin. But Jesus did not. He told a story about a *woman* who lost a coin. The reason is simple: women were as important to him as men. Jesus often told stories about women.

But Bailey suggests an additional reason. The Bible uses a number of different metaphors for God. In the Psalms, for example, the metaphors for God fall into two types. Bailey says,

The first is inanimate objects. From this category come: The Lord is my/our rock, fortress, tower, refuge and shield. All these have to do with security in the face of danger. A second category personalizes God by invoking human images. The most common is: "The Lord is King." Naturally, the king is a powerful figure who, like the images of rock, fortress and tower, also provides security.¹⁰

"But," Bailey continues, "a thin stream of metaphors for God is composed of people who are not (like the Lord in Isaiah 6:1) high and lifted up, seated on a throne at a great distance from the worshiper. Three and only three metaphors compose this stream, and each deserves scrutiny. . . . The three personal, compassionate metaphors for God in the Psalter are: Shepherd, Mother and Father."¹¹

God as Shepherd is illustrated in the famous Psalm 23, which begins, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1).

God as Father is illustrated in Psalm 68:5, "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation." We also see God as Father in Psalm 103:13-14, "As a fa-

¹⁰ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story*, 57.

¹¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story*, 57–58.

ther shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”

God as Mother is illustrated in Psalm 131:1-2, “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.”

It seems that Jesus deliberately developed the parable in Luke 15 to reflect these three metaphors of a compassionate and personal God. The only difference is that while the psalmist includes “mother,” Jesus confined himself to a “woman.”

So, Jesus used the trilogy of Old Testament metaphors about a compassionate and personal God in the parable of Luke 15 in the persons of the shepherd, the woman, and the father.

II. The Woman’s Success (15:9a)

Second, observe the woman’s success.

Jesus said in verse 9a, “**And when she has found it** [that is, the lost coin].”

The woman searched diligently. She had to. There was not much light at all. She had to light a lamp to search for the lost coin. She had to sweep the house, and although the house was not large, the floor was very uneven. A coin easily slipped in a crack and could not be spotted.

Pastors, like teachers, are always looking for good illustrations. Several weeks ago I started Luke 15. I thought that it would be great to find a good illustration of searching for something that was lost. Not long after that my wife, Eileen, and I were able to attend a portion of the Ligonier National Conference in Orlando, FL through the kind generosity of friends. We had a glorious time at the conference. Eventually, at the end of a long day of outstanding teaching, we went to our

hotel bedroom. After Eileen was in bed I discovered that her handbag was missing. After looking around the room, I got dressed and walked all the way back to the conference room. I could not find the bag there. I went to the hotel lobby and reported Eileen's missing handbag. The next morning several of you helped look for Eileen's missing handbag. It was about this time that I remember thinking that I really did not want the Lord to make the illustration quite so personal! After several hours of searching, we had to give up and go home. As we packed up our bags in the hotel room, I spotted Eileen's handbag! It had fallen off the chair and was partially hidden behind the curtain. Oh, how happy we were to find the handbag!

However, I must say that even as I looked for that handbag, I know that I did not search as diligently as the woman. Our success at finding the bag was almost accidental. Her success was the result of intentional and deliberate and diligent searching.

Friends, Jesus is not half-hearted in searching for the lost. He is intentional and deliberate and diligent in searching for the lost. And he always succeeds in finding the lost!

III. The Woman's Celebration (15:9b-10)

And finally, notice the woman's celebration.
Again, like the shepherd, it is a two-fold celebration.

A. *There Is Celebration on Earth (15:9b)*

First, there is celebration on earth.

Jesus said in verse 9b, ". . . **she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'** "

When we lose something and then find it, we want others to share in our joy. When I found Eileen's lost handbag, I texted

all the folks who had known about the lost handbag and helped look for it. I wrote with great joy that the lost handbag had been found. I sensed their relief and joy that the lost handbag had been found.

Likewise, we should rejoice when lost sinners become Christians. We want our brothers and sisters in Christ to rejoice with us that an unbeliever has received the gift of eternal life.

B. There Is Celebration in Heaven (15:10)

And second, there is celebration in heaven.

Jesus concluded with the main point of the parable in verse 10, **“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

A Hasidic story tells of a great celebration in heaven after the Israelites are delivered from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and the Egyptian armies are drowned. The angels are cheering and dancing. Everyone in heaven is full of joy.

Then one of the angels asks the archangel Michael, “Where is God? Why isn’t God here celebrating?”

Michael answers, “God is not here because he is off by himself weeping. You see, many thousands were drowned today.”¹²

God says in Ezekiel 18:23, “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” God does not delight in the death of unrepentant sinners.

But, he does delight in the repentance of sinners.

I don’t want you to miss Jesus’ careful statement in verse 10. We tend to think that it is the angels who are rejoicing. But, actually, Jesus is saying that **there is joy before the angels of God**. Who is rejoicing here? It is God who is rejoicing **before**

¹² Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 2000), n.p.

the angels. God is filled with joy when a sinner repents of his or her sin.

It is interesting that the story of the lost sheep and the lost coin are symbols of repentance. But that is what Jesus says they are. The sheep is an animate object whose bleating might help the shepherd find him. But the coin is completely inanimate. The entire burden for the rescue rests upon the woman. Kenneth Bailey says that “repentance is *being found*.”¹³ The coin did nothing in order to be found. It was entirely the action of the woman that found the coin. And yet Jesus says that being found is an illustration of repentance.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10, we should help find lost sinners.

The story goes that a young man applied for a job as an usher at a theater in the mall. The manager asked him, “What would you do in case a fire breaks out?”

The young guy answered, “Don’t worry about me. I’d get out okay.”

That’s how we respond sometimes.

“What would you do if Jesus came back tomorrow?”

“Oh, don’t worry about me. I’d be okay.”

We are like ushers. Our task is to help people escape the coming judgment. Our task is to find people, who are like lost coins, and point them to the salvation that is found only in Jesus Christ. Let us do so with diligence so that we can rejoice in the salvation of the lost. Amen.

¹³ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story*, 92.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the parable of Jesus in Luke 15 about the lost coin. Thank you for the joy of Jesus for the salvation of the lost.

If there is anyone here today who is still lost, will you grant that person faith and repentance? Will you save that lost person?

And will you enable all of us who are no longer lost to tell others about Jesus and the salvation that can be found only in him. And may we rejoice with all heaven at the salvation of every lost person.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!