

Lost & Found
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Scriptural Text: Luke 15:1-32, ESV

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

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: ⁴ *“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ 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 that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

The Parable of the Lost Coin

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.”*

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ *“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.*

²⁵ *“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”*

Jesus' life and sermons were filled with grace towards sinners, yet Jesus never pacified sinners and that is interesting. He spoke plainly of the wickedness of sin. He called sinners to repentance. He never softened His call for repentance so that He would become more popular or pleasing to natural man's ears. In fact, in John 7, Jesus described Himself this way, as He talks with His biological brothers who are not yet believing and they were still of the world,

⁷ *“The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.”*

Evil is such a potent word. It punches us right in the nose. Jesus does not affirm us in our sin, but He rebukes us in our sin. He calls our works evil so that we would recognize our need for mercy and grace that we would repent and find our life in Him. I wonder if we think of Jesus this way, as a person who testifies the works of every person in the world are evil.

This is the way Jesus describes Himself, yet despite the fact Jesus refuses to mince words regarding the sinfulness of sins, sinners are still intrigued by His message and many are drawn to Him. He is righteous in His judgment. He speaks the Truth, a merciful truth, so sinners are drawn to Him. At the beginning of Luke 15, we find the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him.

Observe Jesus in love draws sinners near to Him even though He speaks persistently and clearly of the evil of sin in their lives. The principle we learn is: True love draws sinners to God, not by glossing over the evil of sin but by magnifying the mercy of God in calling sinners to repentance.

Today the evangelical church is becoming more and more confused about this very truth. Many evangelicals would have us believe speaking directly about the sinfulness of certain sins is unnecessary, perhaps mean spirited, or even hateful. But, Jesus shows us the opposite is true: Love demands we call sin evil. We lose our ability to help the world if we retreat from claiming God's Truth regarding sin, regarding righteousness, regarding judgment. As Christians we must not become satisfied with loving the world solely in non-offensive ways.

It is great and awesome the church is focused upon caring for orphans, feeding the poor, and helping the sick, but we must recognize no one in this world is going to condemn believers or the church for these loving actions. These are necessary expressions of Christian love, but if we love in this way only, we miss God's call to proclaim the Gospel. Peter and John were not in prison for feeding the poor. Paul was not beaten with rods for caring for the orphans. Jesus was not condemned to the cross for helping the sick. As followers of Jesus we must love through the offensive expressions of the Gospel as surely as the non-offensive ones. Love moves past the fear of offending sinners and into the risk of rescuing them with the clear, complete Gospel.

The tax collectors and sinners are drawing near to Jesus because He loves them and He is telling them the Truth. He offers them forgiveness and God's mercy if they would repent. The Pharisees and the scribes, in Verse 2, tell us they

^{2b} ...grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

The Pharisees and the scribes grumble because Jesus is upsetting the social, religious order by inviting people who are clearly outside the circle into the circle. These outsiders are defined by some very bad choices they were making. Tax collectors were Jews who decided to cheat their fellow Jews by siding with the Roman government. Sinners were individuals who decided to disregard God's Law completely and live in wild, brazen abandon. The tax collectors and sinners were making bad choices about God and the religious establishment decided the punishment for those who were making these bad choices was banishment from the inner religious circle forever.

Jesus never affirms the bad choices of the tax collectors and the sinners and I must stress that because often today we have this crazy, wild view Jesus is a person who sat down at the bar with the drunks and put His elbows with them as they told funny stories together. That is not Jesus. Whenever Jesus was with sinners, He was talking to them about sin and righteousness and judgment and God's mercy. He confronted sin in every person.

But, Jesus does not permanently banish sinners. He offers a way back into fellowship with God and this is what upset the Pharisees so. Jesus' actions rejected the rule of the Pharisees. There is an old rabbinic rule the Pharisees had: Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him near to the Law. To the person outside the circle, they were instructed not to go near to them, even to tell them the truth. Jesus tells them that is not right so He went against religious convention.

The principle we learn from Jesus is: No repentant sinner is ever outside of God's circle of fellowship and love. They are all brought into the circle. So, this grumbling response of the Pharisees prompts Jesus to tell three specific parables and all three have the same meaning. They are bothered that Jesus receives sinners who are repenting of

their sin and these parables teach us God does this. These people are the unwashed, the unclean, the undesirable in the Pharisees minds. They are never welcomed. Yet, Jesus tells these parables to communicate the simple idea that God rejoices to receive, to welcome, to eat with, and fellowship with sinners who repent. That is the Gospel and that is the Good News.

These three parables are all very similar, yet they have some distinctions among them. They all have a pattern of being lost, being sought after, being found and then of a great celebration. The first parable Jesus tells is of a shepherd who has one hundred sheep and he loses one. It is lost. It is sought after. It is found. And there is a huge celebration.

Then Jesus tells of a woman who has ten silver coins and one is lost. It is sought after. And it is found. There is a huge celebration.

Then Jesus tells the final story which captures our attention and it is the one which has the most detail. It is the one most directed toward the Pharisees. Each of the parables is given so that they would learn the truth about God they did not know. This is the story of two lost sons and how they are sought after. One is found and there is a great celebration. The story ends without knowing whether or not the other son is found. It does so, so that the Pharisees would be able to realize they would have to answer that question for themselves because they are the older brother. These stories help us to understand the Gospel and God's Good News.

We will consider four Gospel truths these three stories communicate to us. In each of these stories, the person doing the seeking represents God and the person being sought after represents sinful man.

The first Gospel truth told to us is: Man without God is lost. Jesus uses this metaphor of being lost in each of these stories to speak of man's plight as a result of his or her sin. There is a lost sheep, a lost coin, and two lost sons. All represent sinners. The metaphor of lost gives rise to a number of questions.

First, what does it mean to be "lost"? The dictionary defines lost as: not knowing where you are; unable to find your way. Synonyms to being lost are: off course; disoriented; going around in circles; adrift; helpless; desperate; in danger; confused.

Being lost spiritually means we are unable to find our way to God, our way to joy, to purpose, to hope, to Heaven and to life. We are off course. We are adrift. We are helpless, desperate, in danger and confused. We are disoriented in our search for God, unable to find Him and the life He really offers.

One cannot stay lost for very long before they lose their life. That is the danger of being lost. I have a good friend who experienced lost physically in a snow storm on a mountain. He believed for hours and hours he was going to die. It looked as though there was no way out of his situation. He was lost all by himself. But, he was found and rescuers came.

Who is lost? Jesus answers, "Sinners are." There are two types of sinners. There are sinners who are really bad sinners and sinners who are really, really bad sinners. No, those are not the two types of sinners! The first type of sinner are people who are sinners and they know it. The second type are people who are sinners and do not know it. Those are the only types of lost people.

Everyone fits into one of these two kinds of sinners. We either recognize we are lost and we recognize we are sinners, or we are lost and we do not know it and we do not realize that yet.

Both of the sons in Jesus' third parable in our study are equally lost. The son who asked for his inheritance and then squandered it on profligate living represents the kind of sinner who knows they are lost. He knows he is lost. He knows he has rejected his father's design, house, blessing and love. He knows he is lost. He knows he is a sinner. He knows he has rejected his father.

The son who is angry at the father for receiving the prodigal represents the kind of sinner who is lost and does not know it. He is still living inside the house, but he is still outside of the love and blessing of the father. They represent two different ways to be lost, but both are tragically lost. These stories are told to teach the grumbling Pharisees they are just as lost as the sinners they refuse to receive.

The immoral son who returns home represents the sinners, the tax collectors, Jesus is receiving and eating with. The older son represents the Pharisees and everyone like them.

The younger brother who is lost is easier to see. It is on full display in its open disregard for his father, his blatant greed, his public sin of chasing after drink and immoral sex. He rejects his father and he leaves the house. But, the older brother's lostness is also fully displayed in the story and that is what Jesus gets us to.

Religiosity and morality does not keep a person from being lost. This brother is much more moral about his rebellion against the father, but he misses the joy of the father and a healthy relationship with his father. He misses his father's love and the understanding of what a treasure he has in his father. This is all the while he is living inside the house and inside the circle of religion, morality, and acceptability, but he does not experience the fellowship this father offers to him. He is lost. He does not know who he is. He does not know where he is going. He does not know how to find his way to happiness through a relationship with the father. He is lost and he is disoriented in his life. He sees the relationship with his father as a performance, "I do my part and then you owe me. If I am a good son, and if I live according to the rules of the house, then you owe me certain things. That is our relationship. That is how we are going to relate to one another. I work and you pay me."

When that relationship is tested by the return of this younger son, his inner attitude toward his father, which he has had all along, is finally on full display. It is an attitude of utter contempt. His father has a celebration, in a particular culture in which one honors the father. His father invites his son into the public celebration. Everyone is there, but where is the older son? He comes in and says, "No! I will not do it. Forget you, dad."

If we look closely at Verse 29, it is interesting how he responds when his father graciously comes and seeks to bring his son back into his joy,

²⁹ "but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'"

The word "Look!" is basically meaning, "Look, fellow!" and it is not, "Hey, dad," or "Hey, father,"

²⁹ "...I never disobeyed your command,"

Really? I know some of you have some really great sons and daughters. Can any of them say that: I have never, ever once, in my entire life, from the time I was little and all the way until now, disobeyed any of your commands." Yet, that is what this older brother thinks and he says, "You owe me big time, dad, and you are not giving me what you owe me. You owe me the glory of rejecting my brother. You owe that to me and you are not giving it to me." The older brother saw his relationship with his father as a performance. What a proud and arrogant son, "I do not need your mercy, dad. I want what is due me!" He was lost through his obedience. He thought his obedience merited him favors, an inheritance.

The Apostle Paul lived that way in his early years until he was found. He came to realize this had been his attitude all along, that he was this proud and arrogant person who treated God upon a basis of performance. He thought he was performing and saying, "I have fulfilled all of your righteous Laws, all your righteous decrees, so this is what you owe me. You owe me a good life. You owe me the right to expect blessings from You. That is what I have merited. That is what I have earned. Give it to me." Consider what Paul would write later when he was found, in Romans 3,

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in (God's) sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Paul was misusing the Law and the Law should have revealed to him that he needed mercy. Instead, it caused Paul to become self-righteous, arrogant, and proud. The acceptance by the Father does not come through the Law, but through the Law comes the knowledge of sin so we will seek His mercy.

Notice the father's patience and tenderness,

³¹ *"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"*

There is such grace and mercy flowing from the heart of this father. In spite of the son's dishonor and his contempt, the father still wants that son in the joy of the feast. He wants him to enjoy family. He wants him to enjoy meaning and life.

And, the drama reaches its full climax. We are at the end of it in Verse 32. We almost expect there to be a Verse 33 and a Verse 34. The end of the story invites the question: What happens? The son has just publically held his father in contempt. The father publically humbles himself by inviting the son back into the joy of the celebration and this is where the story ends. One son was lost and is found and the other son is lost, but what happens to him? The reason why Jesus does not finish the story is because He recognizes the Pharisees must finish the story. They must decide if they are going to stay like the older brother, outside of the celebration of God and His life, or whether they will enter into the celebration.

It is not for Jesus to finish the story. The Pharisees must do that and that is where we are when we read this story. If we are in the position of the older brother we must finish the story, "What am I going to do? Will I humble myself before the Father, calling out for mercy, or am I going to continue to have a hard heart toward Him?"

Jesus tells the story to tighten the screws in the Pharisees' soul in order to graciously awaken them to the truth that though they were not aware of it, they are just as lost as the sinners they condemn. They should know this because their Old Testament and they know the Bible. They know Jeremiah the Prophet said,

^{50:6a} "My people have been lost sheep."

They know Isaiah the Prophet proclaims,

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray...

Yet, somehow they considered themselves to never, ever having been lost. Beloved, no one escapes this horrible condition of being lost. The first son is lost by searching for happiness through an immoral life, opening disregarding God's Law and he loses his way. The second son is lost by searching for happiness through moral conformity and religious ritual. He suffers the lostness of self-righteousness. This son, also, has gone astray and he misses the joy of the father's love. These two sinners represent two different kinds of sinners, but they represent two people who are equally lost. We must ask ourselves, "What kind of loss do I experience?"

Some come and say, "I am like that first son. Here is where I am right now. I was open in my rebellion against God and I knew it." I want you to know, God has mercy for you if you come in that condition today. But, most of us who are in church say, "No, that is not me," and that puts us in the other category: the lostness through obedience to the Law and a performance based relationship with God. Do you know you are lost? Have you been found?

I like Timothy Keller's description,¹ "The heart of the two brothers were the same. Both sons resented their father's authority and sought ways of getting out from under it. They each wanted to get into a position in which they could tell the father what to do. Each one rebelled but one did so by being very bad and the other by being extremely good. Both were alienated from the father's heart. Both were lost sons. Neither son loved the father for himself. They both were using the father for their own self-centered ends rather than loving and enjoying and serving him for his sake."²

The Gospel truth is: Man without God is lost and every man is naturally without God. That is our biggest problem.

The second Gospel truth is: God lovingly seeks after the lost. What a great work this is. Jesus, in Luke 19, will say,

¹⁰ *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

¹ Founder and Senior Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

² "The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith", Timothy Keller, Penguin Putnam Inc., 2010

In Luke 15, Jesus is seeking both kinds of lost people. He is seeking the sinners and the tax collectors and that is why the Pharisees are upset. But, He tells these stories to seek after the Pharisees. He is not turning His back to the Pharisees and saying, "You deserve the condemnation you receive." No, He is chasing after the Pharisees to awaken them. He is using the stories, in subtle ways, to say, "Pharisees, I love you, too, and you, too, need to be found. You need the grace and mercy of God in your life."

These stories are told to communicate the extreme loss God feels in the alienation of sinners from Himself. God never delights in the death of the wicked, not the wickedness of the Pharisees, not the wickedness of the tax collectors. He seeks in order to save the lost.

A number of years ago I went to a pastor's conference at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. I took my son, Alexander, who was 13 at the time, with me and we had a great time. Toward the end of the conference, there was a period where he wanted to go, but he would be in a separate part of the campus. Moody Bible Institute is right in the middle of the city of Chicago. I agreed but I told him to meet me in twenty minutes at a particular point. He is a very responsible young man, and twenty minutes I am at the spot, but he is not there. I waited five minutes, ten minutes. After fifteen minutes my imagination becomes very active and I begin to worry that he is not there and I wonder where he is. Twenty minutes go by and I really begin to worry. I look out at the city streets and there are all kinds of people. There are some in nice suits and there are some who look like really menacing characters. I have read milk cartons and the longer this went, my imagination is my son's picture on a milk carton and my son in some car with a bag over his, drugged, and carried off somewhere and who knows what has happened to him.

I begin to search and I asked someone to stay in that spot. Soon I have several of my friends searching. After over an hour I have no idea where my son is and my heart is racing. Then, all of a sudden, I turn a corner and there he is. Do you know what I did not do? I did not bawl him out. With tears running down my face, I grabbed him. My son was lost and now he is found because he is so, so valuable to me.

What is valuable to God? Sinners are valuable to God and that is why He seeks after us. Our value is not intrinsic within us. Our value is derived from God's love for us. Why would God love people like us, people who rebel and say, like the son, "Give me my inheritance. I want to spend it." He openly shows contempt for his father and does the unthinkable. Why would God love us? It is not because there is something valuable within us, but it is because God has chosen to love us and that is what makes us valuable. Our value is intrinsic upon the infinite love of God.

In our economy there are all kinds of things which have no value whatsoever, but they possess value, not because of their intrinsic worth but because some people with money say they are valuable. For instance, there is an Hones Wagner baseball card which sold for \$2,800,000.00 in 2007. It is a piece of cardboard. Why is it valuable? It is because some very rich person said, "It is valuable to me and I want it!"

A cheese sandwich bearing the image of the Virgin Mary sold for \$28,000.00 on e-Bay. It is a cheese sandwich!

Scarlet Johansson's used Kleenex sold for \$5,300.00 at an auction. It is a used Kleenex. What is going on? Why is that Kleenex valuable? Nothing inside the Kleenex makes it valuable. What makes it valuable is there is someone with a lot of money who says, "It is valuable to me!"

Why are you and I valuable? It is because there is Someone who is eternal and infinite and who created us and said, "You are valuable to Me." That is the reason why a healthy understanding of our self must begin with God. We will never fix the self-esteem problem until we understand who God is and simply relish and wade into His wonderful love for us.

The third Gospel truth is: The lost are found when they repent. Not all lost sheep are found, not all lost coins are recovered, and not all lost sons are restored.

We are left wondering if the older son will be restored and will be found. There is a condition shared in each of these stories that must be met in order for the lost to be found and that is repentance,

⁶ “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 that was lost.’” ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

This is a statement dripping with sarcasm as Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, “over the ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” There is no one in that category.

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.”

The angels in Heaven rejoice over that along with God.

Then, in Verse 17 and following there is this amazing description of the younger son’s repentance. He is turning,

^{17a} “But when he came to himself, he said...” ^{18b} “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”

The son would not have enjoyed the love of his father had he not repented. Being found by God is always connected to our repentance.

What does it mean to repent? It means we change direction. It means we are going in one direction in our self-will, whether that is the self-will of the immoral person chasing after sins of greed and sex and other pleasures and powers of this world, or it is the same direction with a slightly different path and it is in the direction of morality and religiosity. We need to repent because those are not the paths to God.

Repentance means it is a turning and a change of direction. Wayne Grudem writes, regarding repentance, “Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”³ We tell our self we are going in a bad direction and we recognize we are going in the wrong direction, away from the God who created us and who loves us. We are holding this Father who cares so much us in contempt. We recognize the direction we are going is an evil, wicked direction and we will not go there anymore.

Notice what repentance is not. Repentance is not the long walk backwards in the path. We do not have to wait and say, “I am repenting,” as though we are continuing to walk in order to say we repented. This walk back is the fruit of a genuine change of direction and of a genuine repentance. Repentance is a turning. This becomes the fruit of our turning and the result of a right turning and it is necessary for it to happen if there is a change of life.

But, we must notice, being found is simply in this action. The father did not say, “Let me see how you are a month from now. If you still have that attitude then we will throw a party for you.” No, that is not what the father said. The father rejoiced. This son was not able to give the words to the speech he had prepared for his father and his father cut him off. The son was going to give a speech as to how sorry he is and the father cut him off, “Let us kill the fatted calf. Here is a robe. Here is a ring. Here are some sandals.” The father welcomes back sinners who repent. He did not say, “Clean your life up and then you can repent.”

There is a great hymn Billy Graham used at the end of his crusades,

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me...⁴

That is it. We are a sinner and we are walking down this road, either of immorality or self-righteousness and morality and away from God. Both of those paths are wicked and we repent just as we are. We do not clean up our life, at first, to prove it, we just turn in order to receive God’s amazing mercy. That is the Gospel.

³ “Systematic Theology”, Wayne Grudem, Inter-Varsity Press/Zondervan, glossary, page 1253

⁴ Charlotte Elliott, 1835

The fourth Gospel truth is: Heaven rejoices when the lost are found. God's joy is the constant theme in these stories. It is the main theme in these stories. God Himself is a God who rejoices when the lost repent and they are found. Joy, joy, joy is all through this chapter. There is joy in Heaven when one sinner repents.

Beloved, how humbling it is when God finds joy in us. I hope we would never, ever get over the amazing truth that God rejoices over us with singing because we were lost and we are now found by Him. That is unbelievable!

One of my favorite verses is in Zephaniah 3, and this is what God says over us as sinners,

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away the judgments against you... ¹⁷ The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Think of that. The day the Lord is so happy, that each of us, the lost who were found, he sings over us.

John MacArthur asks this question, "Can you imagine being in Heaven and having God shouting for joy over the fact you are there?" Can you imagine, right now because you are in His Kingdom, that He is shouting for joy and the holy angels are shouting with Him and the church triumphant around His throne is joining in this joyful cry? We rejoice over things we love. God loves when the lost are found.

What are you getting excited about? Some get excited about a vacation in Hawaii and that is awesome. Some get excited about a new house, a new car, or a victory of their favorite sports team, "The Cubs win the World Series this year!" That would cause many people to sing.

Do you know what gets God really excited? It is when sinners repent, when the lost are found. I do not know what that does for you, but I melt under that truth. That is amazing.

Here are four applications regarding God's rejoicing when sinners repent. First, we must humbly worship God every day. If you are lost and are now found, fall on your knees to praise God every day. It is because God the Father loves you He sought after you and He found you. He welcomes you Home when you have no rights and may we never get over this fact. Beloved, if you are not yet found and you are like the younger son still walking in the direction of this world, or like the older son who is walking in the direction of religion and morality, repent and turn because that is the wrong direction and it is holding the Father who is merciful in contempt. Turn to the Father whose grace we need to be found by Him and we can come just as we are.

Second, reject moralism and enjoy God and His grace. Christianity is not moralism and it is not a message saying simply, "Be good." It is a message saying, "Enjoy God everyday. He is an awesome and amazing God. Exult in Jesus the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the Eternal Shepherd of our soul."

Third, seek after the lost. This is what it means to be Christ-like and God-like. God does this. Is there any power, other than enjoying God, in our life that is greater than seeking after the lost? Is there anything to cause us to be more excited and to give our self? The shepherd left the ninety-nine to go and find the lost one. Who are the lost around us? They are all around us in our church, in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces. What are we doing to seek after them? We cannot expect the lost sheep to come knocking on our door and say, "Tell me how I can find my way Home?" We must go out after them. We must seek them.

Fourth, let us rejoice over sinners of every kind who repent. Let us celebrate with them and for them with true joy.

I ask myself: What does it say about a life that has none of these kinds of sinners drawing near as they drew near to Jesus? What does this say about us? It may be saying we are not seeking them out as Jesus did. Or, it may say something worse, that we have the attitudes of the Pharisees and we are saying, "You are outside of the circle. Stay outside of the circle." I believe that is what it says about a life and about a church. As we look around, do we see no one in the categories of these kinds of sinners drawn near to Jesus? What is happening with our life and with our church? This is a convicting question. I trust this question will not convict us but it will change us by God's grace through the power of His Spirit.