

The Parables of Jesus Lesson 9

The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin

After leaving the parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13, we now come to a new section of scripture in Luke 15 as it concerns three parables of 'lostness': the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (or the Prodigal Son). These parables highlight Jesus' message of God's concern for the lost and the joy in their return, contrasting this with the self-righteous attitude of the Pharisees who scorned sinners.

The Text

Luke 15:1-10 NIV Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: 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? ⁵ 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.' 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.

⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Introduction and Context

These parables deal with the issue of 'lostness', which is a word often heard in church referring to 'lost people' who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior. The stark contrast here, and the point of the parables, is Jesus' view of the 'lost' vs. the Pharisees view of them. The context of this parable is verses 1-2 and the Pharisees criticism of Jesus 'welcoming and eating with sinners.' An interesting note is that both groups (Pharisees and sinners) were both gathered to hear Jesus (v. 1) on this occasion, and we can assume they were there for opposite reasons: the sinners to truly hear Jesus' words, and the Pharisees to find fault with Jesus' words. So with this diverse audience and the criticism of Jesus' attitude and actions toward sinners, that Jesus gives three parables directly addressing the 'muttering' of the Pharisees.

Jesus' Interactions with Sinners

Below are some of the interactions that Jesus had with sinners throughout his ministry, and the reaction of the Pharisees. Jesus saw sinners not as liabilities, but as lost family. He didn't look at them with anger, but with compassion (Mt. 9:36). His compassion didn't deny their sin—it dignified their value and gave them away to enter the kingdom of heaven to which they were denied by the Pharisees (Mt. 23:13). Where the Pharisees drew lines to keep people out, Jesus drew paths to bring people home.

- **Jesus Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners (Luke 5:27–32):** Jesus calls Levi (Matthew), a tax collector, to follow Him. Then Levi throws a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and many tax collectors and sinners join. The Pharisees asked, "*Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*" (Luke 5:30), and Jesus responded "*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.*"
- **The Sinful Woman Anointing Jesus' Feet (Luke 7:36–50):** Jesus is dining at a Pharisee's house when a woman known as a sinner enters and weeps at His feet, anointing them with perfume and wiping them with her hair. The Pharisees thought, "*If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is... for she is a sinner.*" (v. 39), but Jesus responded with a parable about two debtors, then says: "*Her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown.*"

- **Zacchaeus the Tax Collector (Luke 19:1–10):** Jesus calls Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, down from a tree and says He’s going to stay at his house. The crowd’s response was *“He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”* (v. 7) Jesus declared, *“Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*
- **The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1–11):** The Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, trying to trap Him into contradicting the Law. Jesus responded, *“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone.”* ... *“Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more.”*

The Parables Explained

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: 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? ⁵ 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.’ 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.

⁸ “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

These parables certainly carry much imagery as they truly are a hallmark of Jesus’ ministry. Each of these parables of ‘lostness’ underscore the idea that Jesus came to ‘seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10), and his mission as ‘being sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matt. 15:24). This would also further include the gospel being preached to the ‘scattered’ Jews and Jews from every nation (Acts 2:5).

In the Old Testament God is frequently represented as a shepherd of his people. A shepherd searching for the lost sheep echoes the book of Ezekiel where God denounces Israel’s leaders where he says, ‘you did not bring back the stray for seek the lost’ (Ez. 34:4), so he promised to do it himself, ‘the lost I will search out’ (Ez. 34:16). Moreover, God promised to set a ‘good shepherd over them’ (Ez. 34:23). Through his outreach to sinners, Jesus is fulfilling this messianic role as he proclaimed himself to be the ‘Good Shepherd’ (John 10:11).

Application for Today

1. God Actively Seeks the Lost:

- These two parables show that God doesn’t wait for the sinner to return—He goes out to find them.
- Evangelism is not just about proclamation—it reflects God’s heart to pursue, seek, and rescue.

2. Every Person Has Inherent Value:

- The sheep and the coin represent people others may overlook or discard.
- We must learn to see people as God sees them—worthy of being sought out and celebrated.

3. The Church Should Reflect God’s Joy:

- We should celebrate when the lost are found.
- Churches must resist a “grumbling Pharisee spirit” and instead develop a welcoming, grace-filled culture.

4. Repentance is a Return to Relationship, Not Just Rule-Keeping:

- The focus is on the joy of restoration, not just the behavioral correction of the lost.
- God delights in bringing people home, not just cleaning them up.

Element	The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3–7)		The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10)	
Who is the main character?	A shepherd, likely a man		A woman, likely a housekeeper	
What is lost?	1 sheep out of 100		1 coin out of 10 (a silver drachma)	
Cause of being lost	The sheep wanders away on its own		The coin is accidentally misplaced	
Search effort	Leaves the 99 in open country and searches until he finds it		Lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds it	
Value of the lost	1% of the flock—small in number, but personally valuable		10% of the coins—more significant proportionally	
Cultural background	Shepherding = common rural occupation; sheep = symbol of Israel		A woman's dowry may have included 10 coins; high sentimental value	
When found	The shepherd joyfully puts it on his shoulders		The woman calls her friends and neighbors to rejoice	
Community reaction	He calls others to rejoice with him		She calls others to rejoice with her	
Heaven's comparison	Joy in heaven over one sinner who repents		Joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents	
Theological meaning	Jesus as the Good Shepherd who seeks the straying		God as the diligent seeker who values even the seemingly insignificant	
Subtle difference	Focus on the wandering nature of people		Focus on the intrinsic value of every person	
Symbol of God's heart	God goes after the one out of compassion		God searches persistently with deep care	
Link to Israel's story	Echoes OT imagery of God seeking His flock (Ezekiel 34)		Hints at covenantal value of Israel's people, even if forgotten	