

God's Search and Rescue

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, You have called me as a pastor to this church, but I am a pastor unworthy of the name of shepherd.

You, however, you are the good shepherd. There is not a sheep among your flock that you do not know intimately. All the strengths, all the weaknesses, all the failings, all the hurts.

And my desire this morning is that you reveal your love to your people as their shepherd, as their father.

So please, minister to us with Your Word. Remind us of how earnestly You sought us to save us. And teach us how earnestly we should seek to save the lost, as Your witness says.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Luke 15, verses 1 to 10. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him.

[1 : 36] And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. So He told them this parable.

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?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 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.

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.

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, which she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

[2 : 46] 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 have lost. Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. For many of us, it's more comfortable and cozy to hang out with other Christians.

We have shared beliefs and values so we understand each other, you feel at home. Hanging out with non-Christians, on the other hand, for some people, can be more difficult.

We have to explain our beliefs and values, which are often at odds with theirs. We can't partake in everything that they say and do, since they often do and say things that contradict the teachings of Scripture.

So it can make us feel out of place, unaccepted even. But we must not let the comfort of being with each other draw us away from befriending those who do not share our beliefs and values.

[3 : 56] And this passage reminds us that God is on a search and rescue mission, and that the love of God compels us to prioritize Christ's mission of seeking and saving the lost.

We'll take a closer look at this passage by first examining the portraits of the major characters in this passage. First, the portrait of the Pharisees and the scribes. Second, the portrait of the tax collectors and sinners.

And third, the portrait of God, as seen in the two parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. First, let's look at the Pharisees and the scribes.

We find in verse 2 that the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling. They were grumbling about the fact that tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus, and that Jesus, instead of turning them away like they usually do, and like they expected Him to, He was receiving these sinners and tax collectors and eating with them.

And because the tax collectors and sinners, I mean tax collectors, because Pharisees and the scribes often play literary foil to Jesus in the Gospels, they make Jesus look good because they're self-righteous and prideful.

[5 : 07] And because we are aware of that, it's easy for us to criticize the Pharisees and the scribes right away. But for a moment, let's try to instead imagine ourselves in the shoes of the Pharisees.

Because after all, the parables are directed to them. It's intended to teach them, the grumbling Pharisees and the scribes. The name Pharisee comes from the Hebrew word meaning to set apart, much like how we as Christians describe ourselves as people who are set apart for God, set apart for His purposes and priorities.

The Pharisees were also the reformers of their day who sought to purify the religion and the society of their time. In much the same way, we view ourselves as people who are heirs of the Protestant reformers.

And the scribes, who are often alongside, who are seen often alongside the Pharisees, they're the Jewish legal scholars, experts of Scripture. And they kind of lend their academic credence to the Pharisees' religious agenda.

So in some way, Pharisees are like the pastors and lay leaders of churches, and the scribes are like the seminary professors of our day. Are you guys hearing about echo?

[6 : 27] Is there a way to turn that mic off? No. And the Pharisees, however, in spite of the fact that they were these religious authorities, they lost sight of God's desire to seek and save the lost.

They were so focused on being set apart from the world that they were so focused on being holy, they kind of separated themselves from sinners.

And in doing so, they so distanced themselves from the very heart of God's mission to seek and save the lost that they lost the ability to rejoice altogether when lost people returned to Him.

And the example of the Pharisees is a sobering one. He teaches us that it is possible to miss God's will while busily doing what we perceive to be God's work.

It's possible for us, even as Christians, to lose sight of God's priority of seeking and saving the lost. But Luke tells us in chapter 19, verse 10, the Son of Man, that's Jesus, He came to seek and to save the lost.

[7 : 39] That is His mission. That's why Jesus came. And that mission continues through us, His people, the church. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity, which is a research center based in Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, they claim that one out of five non-Christians in North America, not the predominantly Muslim North Africa, North America, it says, one out of five non-Christians in North America do not personally know any Christian.

That's 20% of people who live here in North America. 13.5 million people. That's a tragedy.

Do we have non-Christian friends who know that we are followers of Christ? have we shared the good news of Jesus Christ with those who do not know Him, know Jesus?

We may have been trying hard to live good Christian lives. We may have been trying hard to love our families and serve them. We may have even been working hard to serve and love our church family.

But if we are doing all of those things and losing sight of God's priority of seeking and saving the lost, then we are not being faithful. Some people might object at this point, Sean, that's your job.

[9 : 09] You're the full-time pastor. We have other jobs during the week. Of course, I need to share the gospel with my non-Christian friends and neighbors as well.

But as another pastor, Mark Dever, puts it, pastoral ministry is actually behind the lines and equipping gospel laborers.

And actually, you're the ones that are on the front lines where the church meets the world. I'm privileged in that I get to spend time with dozens of you every week and to get to encourage you and exhort you like this to share the good news of Jesus Christ with everybody.

But a cost that comes with that is that I need to work really hard, extra hard to intentionally create opportunities for me to spend time with non-Christians and to share the gospel with them.

So there's a price that pastors pay in their evangelistic opportunities. Some of you might still object at this point saying, well, but I'm not gifted in evangelism.

[10 : 19] that's for people who have the gift of evangelism. Yes, there are some people who have the gift of evangelism just as there are some people who are particularly gifted musically, like the people we see on the stage on Sunday morning.

But do only the musically gifted people sing during worship? Of course not. God wants all of us to sing even if we're tone deaf, even if we have no sense of rhythm.

In the same way, God wants all of us to share the good news of Jesus Christ whether we have the gift of evangelism or not. That's a command for all Christians. And those who have the gift are not intended to, they're not supposed to do it all by themselves, rather they are to use their gift to help and to equip the rest of the body of Christ, the church, to do evangelism.

So what are some common interests that you have with your non-Christian friends that you can explore together? What are some contexts in your life where you can interact with them, get to know them better, love and serve them and share the gospel, the good news of Jesus with them? If we lose sight of Christ's mission, we become like the Pharisees and the scribes. That's the profile of the Pharisees and the scribes. Profile. Now let's see the profile of the tax collectors and sinners. [11:46] The second point. Verse 1 says, Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. As we have seen throughout the gospel of Luke, Jesus, wherever he went, drew sinners around him.

They congregated to him. In fact, he was so popular among sinners and tax collectors, Luke uses a hyperbole to express it. He says, They were all drawing near to hear Jesus.

It's almost as if all the tax collectors and sinners all over Judea have come to see Jesus. It's almost as if they're all coming to him. That's how popular he is among them because they sense that he understands their need.

Because they sense in him not rejection but a welcome, an invitation to follow him. Tax collectors and sinners together represent kind of the moral reprobates, the miscreants of society.

If you haven't been with us throughout our series in the Gospel of the Lord, you might be wondering what in the world is wrong with being a tax collector. The IRS employees in our country have respectable professions.

[12:53] They're not bad people. But the tax collectors in Jesus' day were another story. They were people who had paid the Roman Empire money in order to lease the right to exact taxes.

And these tax collectors had total control over how much money they charged, how much money they taxed. So of course, they would charge a handsome amount on top of the money that they already paid the Roman Empire so that they could make a handsome salary.

So they were, because of this, considered extortionists. They were thieves. And the Jews, for that reason, excommunicated tax collectors from their synagogues. And not only that, if you are a Jewish tax collector, you are seen not only as a thief and an extortionist, but also a traitor because you are taxing, stealing money from your own people and using that to enrich the very people who were oppressing them and suppressing them.

So they, the occupiers, the Romans, the enemies, so they were the traitors. So the Jews, for that reason, despised tax collectors and the Jewish synagogues, they even refused to accept offerings from tax collectors to the synagogue.

Not only do we not want you here, you're excommunicated, we will not even take your offering. We don't want your dirty money. Tax collector is not a flattering description.

[14:30] The word sinner also is not a flattering description. We have in a way sanitized the word sinner because we call ourselves frequently, we're a sinner, we're a sinner and when we talk about sinners that God saves, we often think of people who maybe have committed sins that are more or less socially acceptable.

But in order to understand the passage rightly, when you see the word sinner, you need to imagine the people who do things that are viscerally repulsive to you. What are some things you can think of that are viscerally repulsive to you?

Oh my goodness, I can't believe this person would do that. And depending on kind of your kind of spectrum, where you fall on the spectrum of views, maybe political affiliation or experiences, the kind of sins that cause that kind of reaction might be different.

For some of you, maybe you should think of the white supremacists that seem to delegitimize your identity and experience. For some of you, you have to think of the chauvinistic man that abuses his wife.

Or a militant feminist that lobbies for free abortion up to birth. or a homeless heroin addict.

[15:52] Or a man on the sex offender registry for having possessed child pornography. What are the things, sins that you can imagine that cause this visceral repulsion?

Sinners. Sinners. That's the kind of people you should be thinking about. These people are categorized sinners. They're social outcasts unacceptable to the people in this story. That's the kind of people that are in view. But Jesus, instead of shunning these tax collectors and sinners, lets them draw near to him.

Not only that, he welcomes them. He receives them. And not only that, he doesn't stop at teaching them. It says he eats with them. He shares the table with them.

He goes into their homes. If we categorize different levels of human friendships, we might start from kind of stranger to stranger to acquaintance, an acquaintance to kind of a casual friend, maybe a casual friend to a close friend or an intimate friend.

[17:01] And unless you are an exceptionally open and hospitable person, you probably don't have anyone below the level of casual friend into your home. Because to have someone into your home kind of signals acceptance.

It signals friendship, fellowship. And that's what Jesus is doing with these sinners and tax collectors. And the Pharisees and the scribes have such a kind of revulsion. They're repelled by what Jesus is doing. And they express their distaste for Jesus' practice in the way they refer to Him.

Look at how they refer to Him. They call Him this man. Literally in the Greek it's that one or this one. They don't call Jesus the teacher, which would be the respectful thing to say.

And they do in other contexts. They don't even address Jesus by His name. Jesus receives sinners. They say this one receives sinners and eats with them.

[18:05] But remember that their response is actually quite reasonable if we remember what kind of people these tax collectors and sinners are. Do we, like Jesus, draw, receive, eat with sinners such as these?

That doesn't mean we condone their behavior. Jesus never did that. He never dropped the bar. But He always told people you can come as you are.

You just can't stay there. You come, then repent and believe and follow me. That's the profile of the tax collectors and sinners.

And finally we see a picture of God in the two stories that Jesus tells us. And with this background in mind of the tax collectors and the sinners and the Pharisees and the scribes we can better appreciate these two parables we're looking at of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

Let me reread the parable of the lost sheep so it's fresh in your mind as I'm talking about it from verses 3 to 7. Please follow along with me. It says, 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?

[19:29] 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 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 first parable is about a shepherd who owns one hundred sheep. It's most likely in his the day in the life of a shepherd it's probably in the evening because it's in the evening when you're putting the sheep back into the fold that's when you count to make sure you have not lost any of them.

And so the shepherd is counting he's already had a full day of taking leading these sheep from a patch of grass to another giving them food guiding them getting the ones that go astray bringing them back and after all this he's looking forward to a night's rest he begins to count the sheep that's with him ninety-seven ninety-eight ninety-nine ninety-nine and this time his heart sinks as he realizes that he's missing a sheep that he cares for so he scans the horizon he leaves the ninety-nine it says behind in the open country exposed to the elements unattended vulnerable he goes out in search for the lost sheep he moves briskly he jumps over rocky crags and he scours every corner that of the pasture and as the night deepens he becomes more frantic the thought of the helpless sheep bleeding by a precipice or being attacked by a wild animal quickens his pace and he goes it says in verse four until he finds the sheep it's not a casual attitude okay well I guess if I find him

I find him if I don't I don't it's not I'll just look for him for an hour if I find him great then I'll come back he says he will look for the sheep until he finds the sheep with persistence and determination now of course some of the skeptics among us and that's I include myself and I will ask did the shepherd really leave the ninety-nine sheep the helpless creatures by themselves he must have found the helping hand right have some assistance to watch them perhaps but I think to ask that question is

to miss the point of the parable the very point of the parable is that he leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one lost sheep this is not a picture of a calm collected methodical rescue it's a picture of an urgent and desperate search it's a picture of God's consuming love the desperate predicament of this one lost sheep takes precedence in that time because this one is lost while the ninety-nine are not lost it's like he loves that lost sheep as if it were the only sheep there to love and that actually speaks volumes about how he loves the ninety-nine as well doesn't it because imagine if he lost that one sheep and he said to himself oh just one sheep

I still got ninety-nine more how would the ninety-nine sheep feel about that well I guess I'm not that valuable after his leaving the ninety-nine going after the one lost sheep actually conveys the value the surpassing value and importance of all the other sheep that's in fold he goes after the lost one because he loves the sheep he loves it like the only sheep he has to love the second parable makes a similar point it says in verses eight to ten 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 and when she has found it she calls together her friends and neighbors saying rejoice with me for I found the coin that I had lost just so

[24 : 17] I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents in the ancient world in this culture most of the homes were made of mud bricks or stone bricks so there would be it's mostly windowless houses so there's really no natural light so they would have to use light artificial light or fire candle and if they because the ground also is made of mud bricks and stone there would be a lot of these crevices and a lot of debris and dust and dirt and coins would often get lost get stuck in those crevices and actually because of that it's a boon to archaeologists because a lot of archaeologists can find these coins that have been stuck in the crevices for generations and they can date the period and learn about history and so on and so this is kind of what's happening she loses one coin and the word here of the ten silver coins she loses one it's like it's a drachma it's like the denarius which is its amount its value is about the day's worth wage the regular laborers a day's worth and she loses it and she has nine other ones but she doesn't say well okay well

I'll cut my losses and forget about it no she begins to clean the entire house to find that one lost coin she lights the light she sweeps the ground hoping that that'll make it a little more visible maybe that she'll hear the coin clink move she and again like the sheep it says that she searches for it until she finds it she seeks diligently until she finds it this is a picture of God God's love for those who are lost and notice how the initiative is with God himself the coin does not come rolling to him come find me the sheep are not finding their way on their own they're not cats the shepherd must go unless he goes they do not come back they are lost so the shepherd goes so the woman looks and this is God's heart in our salvation when we are lost apart from him that's how God searches for us diligently until he finds us he doesn't say

I'll try a couple times try a couple times see if he'll respond see if she'll repent no until he finds every last one that belongs to him he searches diligently until he finds it and this image of God as a shepherd has a long history throughout the Bible and one of the most remarkable one is found in Ezekiel 34 and here God condemns the shepherds of Israel the leaders of Israel saying this thus says the Lord God ah shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves should not shepherds feed the sheep you eat the fat you clothe yourselves with the wool you slaughter the fat ones but you do not feed the sheep the weak you have not strengthened the sick you have not healed the injured you have not bound up the strayed you have not brought back the lost you have not sought and with harshness you have ruled them so they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the wild beasts my sheep were scattered but then this is his condemnation of the leaders of

Israel but then after that God promises this in a prophecy through Ezekiel behold I I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out I will feed them on the mountains of Israel by the ravines and in all the inhabited places of the country I will feed them with good pasture and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land there they shall lie down in good grazing land and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep and I myself will make them lie down declares the Lord God I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak and the fat and the strong I will destroy I will feed them in justice God had promised that he will himself do what all of his appointed leaders failed to do all the prophets all the kings all the priests that were supposed to leave

God's people and show them the love of God have failed him have disappointed him they have hurt the sheep they have misled them they had not bound up to hurting they had not fed the hungry but God says I myself will do it and he does that through Jesus the son of God that's why when Jesus comes he describes himself in John chapter 10 he says I am the good shepherd I know my own and my own know me just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep and I have other sheep that are not of this fold I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice so there will be one flock one shepherd Jesus is the one who has come he lives a life of perfect obedience to the father he always speaks the words of

[30 : 41] God so that we are never misled by his teaching he obeys his father unto death on the cross so that he can pay for the sins that we have committed observe the wrath of God receive the penalty for sin and so that after he is raised from the dead we can be called sons of God children of God that's what we call the good news of Jesus Christ he is the good shepherd that came to rescue us we were the ones who were lost and destitute yet he brought us and he restored us to the fold of God isn't that an amazing love how did Jesus love sinners this way why is it so hard for us to love sinners in this way Jesus gives us the answer in verse four because he actually does not think that this is difficult look at verse four with me it says 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 same idea is in verse eight 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 the idea is this this is not uncommon if you were a shepherd and you had hundred sheep and you lost one you would go look for it that's what

Jesus is telling these Pharisees and the scribes this is not out of the ordinary that's what you do for what is yours but you are not treating my people as your own Jesus is saying I go because they belong to God I go because they are my sheep and I am their shepherd that's why I go I look for the lost coin because it is mine it's not some stranger dropping a coin it's mine they belong to me that's God's heart and this totally transforms our understanding of evangelism often people say well if you believe in the doctrine of election that God chooses from before the foundation of the world those whom he will save that people will not evangelize that people will not seek after the lost sheep that exactly the opposite is true when we realize that the people who are lost apart from God they're not some strangers or some to persuade and cajole into coming to faith then of course we're going to be less interested but when we recognize that they are actually our brothers and sisters they're actually our comrades in the kingdom of God but kept illegitimately imprisoned by our enemy our brothers and sisters who do not realize that they have a gracious heavenly father but are living as orphans out in the world when you recognize that you go and you share you go with God's heart for the lost that's the heart of the father of course we don't know who belongs to God it's presumptuous to think that we can tell whether someone's chosen by

God or not so we go to all and we share the good news knowing that there are some among them who will recognize the shepherd's voice and come I think it was maybe two years ago there was a 7.8 magnitude earthquake in Nepal it was a devastating earthquake killed more than 9,000 people I think it injured more than 23,000 and after the earthquake this is a true story that I read in the news at the time a man named Sham Krishna wall he was a bus driver he rushed home to find that his house had crumbled and that his 10 year old daughter Sonia and his 5 month old son 5 month old son Sonis were buried under the wreckage and his his face pale and numb from the shock he began to scabble frantically through the rubble searching for his children and the neighbors came to help but he and his wife

Razmila began to grow despondent they could not hear any sound fortunately after two hours of non-stop digging they were blessed to find their 10 year old daughter Sonia alive but their 5 month old baby was still missing all around them they could hear their forlorn neighbors just despairing and clutching their hearts wailing for their lost loved ones and the Nepalese soldiers arrived around 6pm to help them dig through the rubble and when the baby Sonis did not turn up after 3 hours of digging with all the help from the soldiers they gave up hope and left telling Sham Krishna there's no way an infant could survive this he's in all likelihood dead and you really need to come to grips with this reality I'm sorry we're going later he keeps the father however didn't budge and he kept digging one stone at a time and later a well-meaning neighbor told him and this was in the news as well it's destiny

[36 : 45] I guess it's what they believe some Nepalese believe it's destiny there's nothing you can do you're just going to make things worse give it up but he kept digging and the sun went down came up again the father kept digging 12 hours 16 hours then in this 22nd hour of digging he pulled back a boulder and heard faint cries of a baby almost as if the baby knew that the father was searching for him on the other side calling for help and the father's eyes widened well with tears in joy he dug with new vigor and now everyone rallied around the father because they had heard the sound and even the soldiers came back because they knew that it was not a futile task and they were they dug they dug together and they eventually got baby Sonis out unscathed out of the rubble his face was coated with dust but he was otherwise unharmed why was that father so persistent because it's his child that's how he loves every single one of his children that's how he relentlessly pursued you and brought repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and that's how he is now relentlessly seeking and saving the lost and it's our privilege to be a part of that so if you would close your eyes for a moment to reflect on that truth think about what are the things the priorities and purposes that you're so fixated on in your life that you lose sight of this priority of seeking and saving the lost think about that my prayer for you this morning is that God would disturb your priorities to make this a priority in your life that consumes you as it consumes our heavenly father our lord

Jesus Christ the good shepherd you