

Parable of the Lost Coin

Luke 15v1-10 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 neighbours 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^[a] 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 neighbours 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.

The Pharisees

Why does the Rabbi mix and eat with those people? This was really annoying the Pharisees.

There was perhaps 6000 of them in Israel. They studied their scripture in home groups, and made had additional purity rules which they believed kept them Holy in Gods eyes. It also helped preserve a class system in which Jews with honourable parentage and good behaviour could identify them as pure Jews allowing them to intermarry into priestly families, which others could not. Whilst they worked alongside the lower classes, they showed their holiness by ensuring that they ate separately from any lower classes or general riff-raff. This was their purity line, and was a fundamental part of what they believed was right proper for all honourable Jews. It was taken as granted that their Jewish Rabbis known for their special wisdom on interpreting scriptures, would also keep themselves Holy by upholding the purity laws.

But this popular young Rabbi from Nazareth seems to have no respect for these laws, in that he not only hangs out with the wrong sort, but even invites them into his home and eats with them.

v1. Luke starts with tax collectors (the most hated of all professions) and sinners gathering around Jesus to hear him. The Pharisees and other teachers of the law are there too, and they are annoyed again with Rabbi Jesus for attracting the lower classes, the bad boys and bad girls. They are muttering "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them".

What they want to do is to challenge on why he is disrespecting the 'purity laws'. He knows what they are muttering and he responds with a seamless trilogy of parables. In one sense Jesus is saying to them. "I know you are concerned about the laws, which ones to keep and how to keep them, especially this issue of purity. However I want to talk to you about salvation, and about repentance, the need for each person to turn away from their bad ways and get themselves right with God. It is only within this larger picture than you can really understand why I, a Jewish Rabbi, eat with sinners. So he tells three related parables.

Which image:

If you could choose 3 images or metaphors of God to describe his nature or character what would they be? You can use anything from the bible, or every-day life. What are your suggestions?

Jesus told a trilogy of parables in which he did just that, basing each one a different metaphor for God. He based them on existing ideas from his scriptures, our old testament, and came up with three images, which related to the lives of his followers and listeners.

First of all what did he not choose? Images of God particularly in the psalms tended to have a strong 'homeland security' feel to them. In just one psalm (18), you have a number of these such as God being like a fortress, a refuge, a shield and a stronghold. You get the idea, he's very strong, he keeps you safe. And woe betide his enemies! Jesus never uses these images in his teaching.

Jesus chooses his three metaphors for his parables by pulling out ones that reflect the more personal and caring nature of God. All three images were counter-cultural for first century Jews.

Father, Shepherd, Woman

The Jews in their awe for their God, would not say his name. An all-powerful God, but one often regarded as remote from the muck and bullets of everyday life. The first metaphor Jesus uses is God as our Father, but not some remote deity, this one is your loving Daddy. The sort of Dad that would hitch up his tunic in an undignified way and run down the road to you and embrace you with hugs and kisses. He's our good good Father.

In the first century the job of a shepherd was regarded with disdain and ridicule. They were even denied certain rights because of their lowly status. Yet Jesus reinvigorates the thousand year old image of God from Psalm 23 as the good good Shepherd. One who cares lovingly for his flock. A God which will go to any lengths to search out a lost individual, no matter how far they have gone from God and how difficult it may seem to achieve a successful recovery. He does not give up. His love is so deep and powerful that he will go to any lengths to try and recover a lost one.

Both God as a loving Father, and God as good Shepherd would have been uncomfortable images for the Pharisees, but not so much as the other one of the three. Jesus uses a metaphor for God as a good good woman!

I love listening to worship music every day, and spent a number years reviewing the new releases for a Christian magazine. So I know hundreds of modern worship songs but I was also brought up as a Baptist on the old hymns. Of all the hymns I know from John Wesley, to all the songs and choruses I have heard, I cannot recall one single worship song that praises God for being a good woman. Can you? Yet that is exactly what Jesus is doing here.

Flanking Jesus as he shares with his followers are the religious leaders of his day, the Pharisees, a male-only club, in a male dominated society. From all the imagery of God available to him, as part of his trilogy – he says to them our God is a good woman.

Woman

In his first parable, a man is the champion. In the second, it's a woman. There is a balance to scripture which can easily be overlooked.

Men and women are made in God's image. So God has in their purest form the best characteristics that we find in good men and in good women.

The Old Testament and Apocryphal books, do have woman heroes, such as Ruth, Esther, Deborah, Judith and Jael, who put a tent-peg through the head of Sisera, the opposing enemy commander. Yet with the all-male guild of scribes and Pharisees staring Jesus down, it was a brave of him to create a new story in which a woman is the hero, and clearly represents God, just as the Shepherd did. So why did he do it?

Whilst it is true that his 12 apostles were all men, Jesus also had female disciples (i.e. student of his teaching), and other female followers and listeners. Some quite prominent such as Joanna the wife of Chuza who was King Herod's steward, one of the top men in his court. Despite Herod's opposition to Jesus, she and other women helped to fund the Rabbis itinerant ministry. It is believed that the women may have played a large part in financing his ministry.

Just like Jesus used pictures and parables that the men could readily identify with, he is doing the same here for the women. Just as for the Shepherd he takes imagery from Psalm 23, he is actually here reclaiming a long-neglected female component of the same psalm, the picture of God as a woman. God prepares a table for the Psalmist in the presence of his enemies. The woman always prepared the table.

Comparison

So Jesus starts his 'lost' parables with a lost sheep. From a flock of 100, one is lost far away in open country. It could be anywhere and may take a lot of hard work to rescue it, but the Good Shepherd, a brave and fearless man goes looking for the sheep. He finds it and carries it back in triumph on his shoulders. He calls his male friends and neighbours and they celebrate the restoration of the sheep back into his fold. It's a story that would have been immediately relevant to his male followers in a rural community.

Then he retells the parable with different imagery. A woman loses one of 10 coins in her house, searches diligently for it, and when she has found it, she calls her female friends and neighbours to celebrate her find. Jesus ends both parables the same, by making the comparison that there is much rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, over one bad boy or one bad girl that finds his or her way back into God's family.

The first question that comes to mind is – why bother telling the second parable, when it is so much like the first one, and makes the same point, but is perhaps not so exciting. She dropped a coin, looked for it found it and was so pleased she had a party. End of ! So why did Jesus tell it. Was it just to reiterate the point he had made with the good shepherd, or is he trying to say something else?

The Lost Coin / Female characteristics

Jesus starts – suppose a woman has ten drachmas. These are silver coins, each worth about a day's wage for a male worker. It is most likely the dowry of a woman that comes from a family that is not well off. It is the only money that she brings into the marriage that is still technically hers even if the marriage is dissolved. She will not want to lose any of her 10 coins.

He continues, 'Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? (v8).

Rural homes around Galilee were often made of a black basalt rock as it was readily available. The windows were really just horizontal slots about 2 inches high and over a foot long positioned high up in the walls, and their purpose was to let the smoke out. They let in fresh air but very little light. They also used black basalt slabs for flooring. The only significant light was from the door if open, but still with black floor and walls they were very dark homes. If you dropped a coin between the black flooring stones, in a semi-dark room it would be very hard to find. The woman had to light a lamp, sweep, then get down on her knees and search patiently, carefully and meticulously until she found it.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees that not only does he not only eat with the sinners, but **he diligently seeks them out**. Jesus brings out these generally positive female characteristics involving caring, patient and diligent searching. For many men, including myself, when something is lost, such as keys, after looking in the 3 obvious places, the man soon loses patience and seeks help 'Where's my keys – I am going to be late for work!'

Jesus is identifying himself with the good woman, but the implication of the first parable is also linking the woman as a symbol of God. This parable is unique. No other parable uses a woman as a symbol for God.

Jesus, God are upset when someone is lost to them. With patient and meticulous care they will seek out the lost, just as the woman does with the coin. In 1 Corinthians 13v4 when Paul pens his marvellous description of love. He starts Love is patient, love is kind. This is the love of the Good Good Woman.

Jesus is not afraid or ashamed to identify with typically more female characteristics. Earlier in Luke (13v34) as he approaches Jerusalem, and foresees its destruction, his heart goes out for the great Jewish city and he cries out (O Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together as a Mother Hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you are not willing.)

Jesus not only appeals to both men and woman with his stories and metaphors, but he points to a God that as all the male and female characteristics in their purist form.

Distance

There is another striking difference between the two parables. The sheep was missing far away but the coin was lost in the home. There are the tax collectors, prostitutes and the others generally labelled as impure sinners, which have wandered a long way from Gods ways, who avoid the temple and synagogues. These are the lost sheep, that Jesus seeks out. These are the ones lost to Israel that the Pharisees denounce and avoid. Jesus wants the Religious leaders to see that this is part of their fold, it's their religious leaders that have lost them. They are bad shepherds, and they should be doing what it takes to bring them back to the fold, not casting them out.

But there are others that are lost. These are at home like the coin but they are still lost, because even though they may look like one of Gods in what they say and what they wear, their hearts are a long way from where he wants them to be. Hearts full of pride, malice and selfishness. They may be in the very shadow of the temple, but still lost. Amongst the lost at home are surely some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law standing around muttering. How Jesus would love to gather them under his wings like a Mother Hen to her chicks, but they are not willing.

The parables of the lost sheep and lost coin, prepare the ground for the parable that follows. The parable of the prodigal son, sometimes called the parable of the lost sons.

In this parable the younger son is disobedient to his good good Father, gets his inheritance early, travels to a distant land and blows the lot of it on wine and women and the general high life. He is like the tax collectors and sinners, he is a lost sheep, he is lost far away.

Back on the farm is the older brother, up until now he has been consistent and obedient and on first inspection seems to have been loyal to his father and done all the right things. Yet his heart is hard, and he is in angry with his Father when his brother returns and is taken back in. He is like the scribes and Pharisees, he is a lost coin, he is lost at home.

The same can be true for us today. You can go right off the rails, leading a destructive life-style and keep far away from any Church or Christian influence, but Jesus will still be wanting to seek you out like the good good Shepherd.

But you can also be a regular at Church, but never fully opened your heart to Jesus, accepted his forgiveness, and asked him to make a real difference in your life. You may have never felt the loving touch and power of his Holy Spirit on your life. Even though you are at home in Church you can still be lost, but Jesus is still patient and meticulous in reaching your heart, like the good good Woman.

The two parables would have been hard hitting to the Pharisees. They drew images from Psalm 23, justified the importance of reaching the lost from their own beloved scriptures, but then using the symbol of a good woman for God, pointed out to them they were also lost to God and needed seeking out in the same way as the tax collectors and other sinners did. This was indeed a very hard message for them.

Is purity important?

But were the Pharisees wrong to want purity, to keep Gods laws whilst keeping their minds and bodies from bad influences. Of course not. Some of their motives were wrong, but purity itself is a good thing and necessary thing to want. We all have purity laws, and set our own purity lines, which separate what is acceptable to us, and what is not.

Who owns a dog and has a garden? Presumably you allow the dog into the garden, then at some point you clean up the dog poo and put it in the bin. Yes? That's quite acceptable and a necessary normal part of owning a dog. However once when I was a teenager visiting a friend whose Mother kept Bassett hounds.

He showed me into his Mums bedroom once when she was out, and showed me what the dogs had left in her bedroom, some large, steaming piles of poo! I can remember a deep feeling of disgust. What was different? It could still be cleared up like it could in the garden, but the dogs had crossed the purity line. Dog poo is OK in the garden, but not in the bedroom. That is unacceptable to us.

The Pharisees had set their purity lines in the wrong place if they wanted to be holy and acceptable to God. They were achieving an outward purity, one in which they would be seen to be doing holy things, but their hearts were far from pure. Jesus once described them as “whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness” He said to them that “you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Mt 23v27-28).

Jesus is not though saying that seeking after holiness and purity is wrong. Proverbs 4v23 says “ Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” Paul says to the Phillipians (4v7) that the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

For us as Christians, purity and holiness are important. . If we abuse our bodies with drugs, excessive drinking or eating then we become unhealthy. Take care what you read and watch. Guard your hearts and minds from all the negative stuff that will bring you down such as porn, violence, horror, gossip. Our minds store all these images sub-consciously and they affect us. It seems to me that as we set ourselves apart from this negative stuff then Gods power is able more to flow through us. It's what we called consecrating ourselves for Him. These are our purity lines. For example, I won't watch horror films so I don't get nightmares caused by such images

However what Jesus is pointing out to the Pharisees is that their desire for purity, should, not come ahead of bringing salvation to the lost. If they denounce those who have strayed away and give up on them, in order to keep themselves pure, and also making themselves look a lot more holy in comparisons to the lost sheep, then they have it got it all wrong. In Jesus' book, leading others to repentance and salvation, trumps the type of purity that they were seeking. Jesus made it clear on other occasions that purity was not about what you touched or what you ate, but what was in your heart. This was made evident by things you said and the way you behaved, especially towards others.

Whilst aiming for purity ourselves, at the same time we should be accepting of the negative life-styles of others, whilst loving them and helping them to be found by their Good Good Father, whether they are lost at home or away.

There are times when we should be mixing with those that have gone far from God, the heroin addicts, the corrupt businessmen, and foul mouthed drunkards. I don't think God will ask us to do something like that if we had weakness in that area, and were prone to fall into those bad habits ourselves. It is right if God gives us a real opportunity to be light and salt in their world, to take the opportunity and be Jesus to them. I spent several years doing detached Christian work on a rough estate, and came alongside all sorts of negative life styles and criminal activity, but it was still possible to stay pure in that environment, and to love those of all types that God put in front of me. I sometimes got it wrong but God protected me and it was a very humbling experience to be able to love them with the love of God..

As a church we are prone to getting this the wrong way round. Some of us expect people to turn away from their negative stuff and stop doing what is wrong, believe and be baptised, and then they can become church members. Instead it should be the reverse, we should be reaching out to the lost, wherever they are at, inviting them to be part of their family, helping them to believe and be baptised, and then helping them towards purity. The need for Salvation and repentance trumps the need for purity. That is what Jesus is telling the Pharisees and that is what he is still telling is today.

Value

We usually associate purity with value. A 24 carat gold ring is purer and more expensive than a 9 carat one. But our own purity in Gods eyes does not affect our value.

The Pharisees looked at the tax collectors and the sinners, in other words the lost sheep, and devalued them. These are sinners, if we eat with them, we will be defiled. Any value they may have once owned, was now gone in the eyes of the Pharisees, but not in the eyes of God.

Our ultimate value in Gods eyes never changes. The woman in the parable lost a drachma, worth a days wage for a man £100. The value of the coin before it was lost was £100. It fell on the floor, slipped between the black basalt floor slabs, getting scratched as it fell on the slab edge and spent a while in dirt between the slabs. When it was recovered, it looked a lot less shiny. How much was it now worth? One drachma – or one hundred pounds. What was it worth, when it was lost – one drachma. The value of the coin never changes, and whatever happens to the coin on its journey, it will never change. A coin lasts on average 30 years and will have thousands of different owners in that time, it may have been lost and found several times. Whilst others things change around it , the coin keeps its face value. What other happens to us, we don't lose our face value to Jesus. Those that have been off the rails, those that have been lost and abused, often feel that they are now worthless because of their self-destructive choices. Whatever happens to you, no matter how impure you become, it does not affect your value in Gods eyes. He loves you so much, he placed a price-tag on you which was the death of Jesus on the cross. It's an unmeasurably high value. The work has been done on the cross, the price has been paid, and your value has been set. Whatever you do, however far from God you stray, whether you get lost at a distance or at home, in the wilderness or in the church, your value never changes.

God loves to be with his people. We see this throughout the bible. The message in these parables to anyone whose hearts do not belong to Jesus, is that you are so loved, that Jesus will seek you out, and look for your repentance, your change of heart. He is looking for those who are lost, find them and bring them home if they want to be found and will turn back to God.

Party

(v9-10) when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Heaven is dressed up in party clothes ready, waiting to cut the ribbon, to pull the party streamers, to break open the champagne. Waiting for one question to be answered. Will the lost one, choose to be found. When just one lost one is found the party begins.

In the 90s, the decade of dance music and raves (a music which was intimately linked with drugs like Ecstasy), along, with two friends I produced a Christian dance album. We called the group S'dANCE (for sanctified dance), as we were claiming this type of music back for God. The title of the albums was 'and the angels raved on'. Rave parties went on all night, and we wanted to get this sense of this verse where heaven's hosts are partying all night over one person saved.

Love

Jesus looks at the Pharisees. You have been bad Shepherds and lost some sheep from Israel's sheepfold. You have been bad stewards and lost some of the precious coins from Gods treasury. With the deep deep love of God, flowing from my heart and coursing through my veins, I have come to restore these lost ones. With patience and meticulous care, I have come to seek them out whether they are lost far away or in the temple itself. For those who want to be found, including yourselves, then when you give your heart over to God in repentance, you will be saved, and there will be a party in heaven.

That is why I go to the sinners. That is why I invite the tax collectors and prostitutes into my home, because I am compelled by Gods love to reach out to the lost. They will not be found unless I am the Good Good Shepherd, unless I am the Good Good Woman.

Outreach

This was Jesus speaking 2000 years ago. But since then he has shared with us this work of reaching the lost. The words of Jesus before he left us were

“¹⁹ Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt 28v18-20).

Conclude

We need a pure heart and dirty hands.

I think that Jesus is saying to us today, that our purity lines are important. That we should be guarding our hearts and minds for him, but for most of us that will not mean separating ourselves out from those around us, those who lost are need to be found. The lost will not be found, wherever they are, unless they are looked for, both at home and far way. The good good Shepherd gets dirty, perhaps even injured by thorns and brambles as he seeks the lost far away. The good good woman, with all her diligence, kindness and patience is on her knees in the dirt with a sweeping brush examining all the cracks looking for the lost.

We are called to do the same, with the deep deep love of Jesus in our hearts we are called to get our hands dirty whilst keeping our hearts pure, to go out where he calls us and find the lost and lead them back to the Good Good Woman, the Good Good Shepherd, the Good Good Father amen.

Luke 15 v1-10 (inc Lost Coin 15 v8-10)

Pharisees and Purity – Annoyed./House Gp/ Holy/ Pure Jew / eat separate

Which image of God – Homeland security – 3 shocking countercultural - songs

Woman – Gods character. OT heroes. NT followers. Ps 23v5 table.

Compare Parables – why bother with the 2nd?

Read v8 Lost Coin / Female charac' – Dowry, dark, seek diligent/patient/kind -Hen

Distance – far (sheep) near (coin) – prodigal /us

Purity important ? Trumped – own lines (horror) – Whaddon – Church right way round.

Constant Value - £100/coin – 30y – not devalued.

Read v9-10 - Party – lost is found- heaven party; S'dANCE; Gods khar-ah (joy)

Loved – Why? Because they (bad) lost them; His love finds them.

Outreach – Now us for the 98% - Read Mt 28v18-20

Conclude – Pure hearts and dirty hands – Shep/woman – back to good good 3

Jesus once described them as “whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness” He said to them that “you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Mt 23v27-28).

Mt 28 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.