

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. 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. Does he not 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. Does she not 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.”
(NIV84)

Theme: Love the Lost

1. Search for them.
2. Rejoice when they are found.

Have you ever lost something that was important to you? Maybe it was your favorite toy growing up, or an important homework assignment. Perhaps it was something dear and precious like a wedding ring. When this happens you worry that you might never find it. You're horrified at what might happen if it's lost for good. So what do you do? Well you search high and low for it. You turn over every last stone until you find it. And when you find it you have nothing but joy and relief.

But how did other people react when you lost it? How did they react when you found it? Did anyone really care? Sure some people might have helped you a little bit or said something to the effect that they hope you find it. But did they really care? Do you care all that much when someone else loses something? Probably not much.

What about if a Christian is lost? How do you feel if someone falls away from the one true faith? Do you even care? Are you worried or horrified at what might happen? Sadly we may care if someone is lost. And we don't really do much rejoicing when the lost are found. That is why Christ encourages us to love the lost. Search for them when they fall away and rejoice when they are found.

Jesus was in the last year of his ministry, making his way to Jerusalem, when our text for today takes place. People from all walks of life were coming to listen to him. Some tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus preach. So did some Pharisees and Scribes. Now tax collectors were looked upon as the lowest of the low. They were Jews who worked for the Roman government. If that wasn't bad enough, many tax collectors were crooks. They often demanded more from someone than they owed so they pocket the rest. Sinners is a term that refers simply to those who are living a life contrary to God's Word. It could refer to any number of different groups or people.

Then there were the Pharisees. They prided themselves in living good lives. They strived obey God's laws. But that wasn't good enough for them. So they made laws of their own on top of God's laws. And they looked down upon those who didn't follow the laws as they did. The Scribes were those who wrote down and copied the law. They were experts in the Hebrew Scriptures. They may have known the words of the Old Testament better than anyone. The Pharisees and the Scribes looked down upon the tax collectors and sinners. They thought they were better than those people were. And so they mocked Jesus for hanging out with them. They wondered how Jesus could welcome or even eat with such a group of people.

So Jesus told the Pharisees and the Scribes two parables. Both have the same meaning. Jesus asked what a shepherd would do if he lost a sheep? Even though he had 99 other sheep, he would leave all his other sheep behind to go after the lost sheep. For that one sheep was precious to him. The same would stand for a woman who lost a coin. Even though she had nine other coins just like it, she wanted this one. So she would search the whole house over and over again until she found it. Why? Because she cared about that coin.

The Pharisees and the Scribes didn't. They didn't care about the lost. The tax collectors and the sinners are the lost sheep and coin. At one time they were believers, but they lost their faith. They were once God's children. They were his sheep. But they fell away. They were enticed by the riches of the world, lured away from the enjoyment of sexual pleasure, they rejected God for their own benefit and happiness. They wandered from the flock and the care and protection from the Shepherd. They were lost.

The Pharisees and the Scribes didn't care that the tax collectors and the sinners were lost children of God. They looked down upon them. They wanted nothing to do with them. And they mocked those that did. Does that describe us sometimes? We can't help but just shake our head and those who fall away. We may look down upon those who keep on living in sin. We often want nothing to do with those wander from the flock. We arrogantly think that we are better than they are. They messed up, so we are disgusted with them. Or we're apathetic. We may not really care all that much. It doesn't bother us that they lost their faith. When we see someone living in sin we pass it off as if it's no big deal. We may look the other way when someone is sinning against the Lord. We may even make excuses because everyone else is doing it. We often ignore that they are on their way to eternal damnation. We try to tell ourselves that pointing out their sin is an unloving thing to do. But they are on their way to hell, so the loving thing to do would be to seek them and share the Word with them so they may repent and turn to God

We may not care at times, but Jesus always has. We see him dealing with sinners time and time again. In Matthew 11 Jesus claimed that some people called him, **a friend of tax collectors and sinners**. Here their argument was that he welcomed sinners and ate with them. Why would Jesus knowingly hangout with thieves, prostitutes, and other sinners? Because he loved them. He had a deep rooted care and concern for the lost. So he didn't shun them. He didn't look down upon them or reject them. Rather he welcomed them and ate with them.

That way he could talk to them. These were the people who needed to hear Christ the most. Earlier in Jesus ministry, when the Pharisees were again complaining that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus told them, **It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but**

the sick. Jesus is the doctor for the sick. He would have assured them that their sins wouldn't be counted against them. That they would never come back to haunt them. For he would go on to die for their sins. He would become guilty of all the horrible and wicked acts that caused everyone to look down upon them. Because of Christ they would be declared not guilty. Through faith in him they would receive the gift of salvation.

Christ loved the lost. So he welcomed them. He ate with them. And most importantly he preached the gospel to them. May we have the same love for the lost. We don't want anyone to perish, but all come to the knowledge of the truth. We want everyone to join us in heaven forever. It tares us up when someone loses their faith. It pains us whenever we see someone fall away and leave the flock.

So let us seek the lost. Let us go after them. Like the shepherd with his lost sheep. Or the woman and her lost coin. Seek the lost. Go to them. Point out their sin and the dangers they face. Then share the gospel with them. Assure them of free forgiveness through faith in Christ. Assure them of the eternal life that awaits them. As James says, **Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins**.

Loving the lost doesn't just mean that we seek them when they fall, it also means we rejoice when they are found.

The Pharisees and the Scribes didn't care that the tax collectors and sinners were lost. And so they wouldn't have cared if they were found. And at times we may fall into their footsteps. We may think that we are better than the lost. But the ironic truth is that we were at one time the lost. All of us were born as enemies of God. He didn't know him or anything he had done for us. We hated God. We were dead in our transgressions and sins. We were on our way to hell. Until God saved us, all of us were lost. We are no different than anyone else.

And even today, we may at one point become the lost. We are all sinners. We may fall away. No one is immune. You may think to yourself, "I've got a strong faith, I'll never fall away." That's what Peter said right before he denied three times that he knew the Lord. That's probably what David thought right before he committed

adultery and then murdered someone in order to cover it up. That sounds kind of like something the Pharisees and the Scribes would think. But they were lost; they had no faith. The warning from Paul to the Corinthians still stands true for all of us today. **If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**

In the two parables that Jesus told both the shepherd and the woman did the same thing. They searched and searched until they found what was lost. And then they rejoiced. They called together all of their friends and neighbors so that they could celebrate too. They were that excited. Their worry was replaced with joy. That is what happens in heaven. The Lord rejoices whenever someone repents and turns back to him. Paul told Timothy that God **wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.** God doesn't want anyone to perish, but all to live. So when someone who is on their way to hell turns from his evil ways and trusts in him again, the Lord rejoices. And the angels with him.

Is that our same attitude? Sadly, it might not be at all times. We still might look down upon sinners who were lost and returned. "How can we let them back in the church after what they did? How can God ever take accept such a wicked person into heaven?" It's almost as if we are jealous. They got to go out and sow their wild oats—do what they wanted to, when they wanted to do it, with whomever they wanted! But we had to sit here and be good Christians—and now we are told that God is going to forgive them? That's not fair. We may act like the brother of the prodigal son who became angry when his Father through a celebration when his brother returned.

But again, think back to what you were—lost. Think about how you can easily fall away. You are no better than anyone else. We all deserve God's wrath and punishment. And yet Christ has died for all. He has paid for the sins of all people. So we don't want that gift to go to waste. We don't want anyone to die without faith. So we seek and save the lost. We share with them the gospel. So that the Holy Spirit may work faith into their hearts. So that they may repent and turn back to God.

We seek the lost so that God may rejoice. And so do the angels. And we join them. There is no jealousy. No resentful feelings. Just joy. Singing the praises of God forever. For what was lost has now been

found! We rejoice because we will live with Christ forever. We will live with him and all our fellow believers, who were at one time lost, in heaven.

It's not a good feeling when you lose something that you love or need. So when you find it you rejoice. How much worse is it when someone loses their faith, falls away, and is on their way to hell? But how much greater is the joy when they repent! So let us follow Christ—love the lost, seek them so that they may be found. And let us rejoice with the Lord and all his angels when they repent. For we will live with them forever in heaven! Amen.