

Luke 15:1-10 Lost & Found: the Value of every 1

And just like that it was lost. I was with two of my children, the week before last, in Watertown WI. One of them suddenly couldn't find their student ID. We checked around the seat and floor in the nooks and crannies of the rental vehicle. No ID. Maybe it fell out by the checkout line at Walmart. So they dialed up the Walmart number. After explaining, and being put on hold, and explaining again, and being put on hold again, a final person on the other end said that nothing had been turned in. Not a catastrophic loss. But in the life of a high school student and to the pocket book of the high school student a \$20 (I think it was) replacement fee isn't small beans either.

The ID can be replaced; think about the difference if what is lost is a one-of-a-kind item. I just last Sunday heard someone share about the time they lost their wedding ring. They had taken it off briefly. They later remembered last seeing it sitting on a table in their house. And they remembered one of their small children had been playing at the same table. From there who knew what had happened to it. With all this now in mind, they kept a couple bags full of garbage sitting in the kitchen rather than taking them out to the trash bin. Why? They'd go through them when they had time a little later. Maybe the ring had gotten in the trash. But then someone else, not knowing, took those trash bags out. Ugggh!

What's the most precious thing you've ever lost? And what lengths, if any, did you go to in an attempt to find it? | If you found it, think about your reaction. [Pause.]

Now imagine this. What if the item is something of essentially no value of its own, and its value is only because of the value you've given to it (because of what it means to you). I remember one of the children of the congregation having a penny recently that they thought was special. Before it was time to leave church, suddenly it was noticed the penny was missing. You can maybe imagine the scene of the child looking, getting frantic, wanting to keep searching for their treasure. |

We're compiling right now important concepts about our topic *Lost & Found*. We've covered the thoughts of how... 1) If something is lost, what length will one go to in order to find it? 2) And how does that, the length you'll go to find that item, relate to how valuable it is (sometimes simply because the value given it by the one who wants it back)? 3) And, then, what reaction / what feeling is brought if the lost item is found?

Did you wonder what happened in the end with the lost wedding ring I told you about earlier? Well, I don't recall how many days later they said it was, but the child who had been playing where the ring was last seen evidently had also been playing with a little finger puppet. And the ring had gotten inside. And now that you know that much, you know the ring was found. Think of the joy you'd feel if that was you. It's a one of a kind thing. And it is a item that has more than the simple value of the precious metal, because of what it means to you.

Now let's elevate the scenario to an even higher degree. What if the something lost is no longer a thing at all? It is a *someone*.

Maybe you've experienced this, where someone you love has been lost. If even for a few moments, think of that time. And even if you haven't been through exactly that, think of a time you were separated from someone you love, and then you were later reunited. Close your eyes and try to picture that moment of being reunited. What does the scene look like? | And now what word or description captures the feeling of that moment? | I'm hoping for the response, more than any other, of: JOY.

Now... dive back into our Bible verses.

It's God, our Maker and the Ruler of the universe, doing the searching here.

- I know you know of missing person alerts when someone is lost. There are *Amber Alerts* and *Silver Alerts* and *Search & Rescue* efforts. Think how many people will go to extreme lengths in searches to find a single missing person.
- But in how many of those search efforts have you ever heard of the President of the United States going out and doing the search himself?

Luke ch.15 tells how it's **our God** who goes out, who searches. Our Maker, the Ruler of the Universe! And looking for whom? One. | That's what He has done for each of us.

If He had not acted, we would have remained lost forever. He journeyed. And searched. Until He found each one who ever has been brought into His family, to know Him, to receive His forgiveness, to be given life, to have life eternal with Him. Though in vs.1 we see a scene of sinners gathering to Jesus to hear him, it was actually Jesus still who did the seeking and

the finding on the day described. For this is a matter of the heart. And God's Word is what breaks down the walls of error and unbelief in human hearts, and brings people to know Him and trust in Him and treasure His truth.

That's the truth Jesus gives to us also in these teaching lessons of the lost sheep and the lost coin. It's a truth so clear in the rest of the Bible. See how much God loves: to seek and to save the lost.

And if that's not enough for us to grasp how valuable we each are to Him, go on further in the scene. Look who is celebrating when the lost one is found. He asks others to join in. But who is the first one rejoicing? Vs.5 – The Shepherd takes His sheep – you –, carries you, and rejoices over you. And in verse 10 we're told there's joy in the presence of the angels of God. But who in the scene starts the celebration off? It's our God. God, himself, is bursting with joy.

- Talking with one of you this week about this section one of the comments I received was: "the joy of God here means a lot, especially with my background." The joy of God is something for all of us to comfort in here. But...
- What's the reason that someone might say "especially with my background" it means a lot to me? It could be any number of reasons. Think about the individual who has been told, or has felt, they have to do something to earn God's love. Or think about an individual who has been given the impression by others, or maybe they've come up with the idea on their own, that they aren't worth much. Are there people who have been treated like they aren't wanted? And even given the message that God wouldn't want them.

Here is Jesus' Word to answer such confusion, error and hurt.

Your value is not based on what you offer God. It's not because you cleaned yourself up and came knocking on His door. He came for you. He came seeking. He came saving. He came and brought you to repentance...

- This man welcomes sinners. That's the statement made about Jesus. Yes, Jesus welcomes sinners. But those who don't think they need to repent aren't the ones being spoken of. He welcomes ones He, our God, has brought to admit sin and trust in Him to remove our sin. And so everything is made right between us and Him again tehn. All by His doing.

And He is the One who through His Word keeps this heart of repentance beating within us. His Word brings us to see our daily need for repentance. The example of grumbling from our verses today makes this point.

A church-going group of folks in Jesus' day were grumbling at how Jesus handled things. They had other ideas about how He should handle the issue of sin and sinners. Now our grumbling might not be the same type as the Pharisees. We're glad for the way Jesus handles sin. There's no other way we could be rid of it. We understand. But is there still sinful muttering and grumbling that we have given in to?

It's easy enough to fall into mumbling and grumbling about others and put them down. Of course, for many of us probably, someone taught us long ago that it wasn't nice to say mean things about other people. So most of the time the bad things we had to say didn't get said. But that hasn't always stopped the grumbling and muttering altogether. It simply went a bit underground. How often does our heart mutter: with grumbings of sinful pride, of self-inflation, thoughts that put others down and separate ourselves from them? And honestly, who would claim that such attitudes don't ever affect how we treat others? We may control a lot of the "above surface," obvious-to-everyone sins. But everyone who is being honest will admit the sins of each new day, and the evil they are – the evil they've brought.

And so it means so much to us that... There is rejoicing over every sinner who repents.

We turn to the One Who came *for us*. We trust that *in Him* we have forgiveness. We trust *He* is our righteousness. Jesus, after all, is the One Who came to seek and to save the lost, us. How do we know that? He himself said those very words.

God's Word to us here today brings to bear a lot of personal assurance.

But don't leave off the next and intimately related application. This love of God for you individually is also... the way He values and loves every other 1. He wants every sinner to come to repentance.

And so our prayer is: May He work in us the same kind of heart for others, one that values every 1 – a heart that rejoices in every 1 brought to repentance. Amen.