



Who Are the Lost?

This morning I want to bring you a message from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15. I have entitled this message, "Who Are The Lost?" Our scripture has been read for us but I call your attention once again to verses 1 and 2 of Luke 15. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

Please notice the indignation of the scribes and Pharisees as they fairly grind their teeth in rage and bring this bitter accusation against Jesus. They do not accuse Jesus of being a snob, but rather they accuse him of fraternizing with sinners. In reply to their bitter accusation, our Lord preached one of his most marvelous sermons. It is composed of four parables:

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

The Lost Coin

The Lost Prodigal Son

The Lost Elder Brother who stayed at home.

All four parables are connected by the one word, "lost." What a tremendous story concerning God's attitude toward the lost. We might better spare almost any other chapter in the Bible than this chapter - the 15th chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

Who are the lost? In response to the question that makes up the subject of my sermon this morning, I suppose that the obvious answer that we would come up with would be - the lost sinners - that's the liars, of course. The lost sinners are the ones in the penitentiary. The lost sinners are the thieves. The lost are the murderers. The lost sinners are the adulterers and the adulteresses. Naturally, these are the lost. But it is so surprising when we study this sermon by Jesus that He gives an entirely different answer from what we would expect. Jesus' answer in this parable indicates that the lost are those who are out of the right relationship.

This pen that I always carry in my shirt pocket might be in a lost condition if it were on the desk at the house when it ought to be in my pocket. I carry the pen in my pocket so that it will be available when I need it and therefore if I reach for the pen and it is not there and has been misplaced, and is out of its right relationship, it is lost. The indication is that there are many people whose names are on the church rolls and yet they are lost, because they are out of their right relationship with Jesus.

There are four different types of lost persons according to this sermon that Jesus preached.

i First of all, some people are lost like a sheep.

This is one of Jesus' most beautiful parables. It tells about 99 sheep that are safe in the fold. But one sheep was lost because it was out on the mountain - some place out in the storm away from the shepherd, away from the fold. And so Jesus said that the shepherd left the 99 that were safe and He went out through the darkness of night and through the storm, searching until he found that one sheep that was lost. He then laid it upon his shoulders and rejoiced and brought it back to the fold.

Obviously some people are lost like a sheep. Why was that sheep lost? Had it fallen over a cliff to its death? Certainly not. Had a wolf come in among the flock and stolen away one of the

sheep and killed it? Not at all. It was very much alive. It was lost because it was away from the shepherd, away from the fold. So there are multitudes in the world today who are lost - not because they are so bad, but because they are outside of Jesus Christ, or away from the church. They have no one to guide them - no one to teach them; and so they are lost, like a sheep.

II In the second place, Jesus said some people are lost like a coin. And then he told the parable about the woman who had 10 silver coins. And she lost one of them. When she discovered that this one coin was lost she swept the house diligently, searching everywhere until she found that one lost coin. When she found it she called all her neighbors and friends together and there was great rejoicing because the lost coin had been found safely once again.

Why was that silver coin lost? Had it ceased to be silver? Certainly not. Was the image of the Emperor erased from it? Certainly not. The coin still had the same value as when it was in the woman's pocket. The silver coin was lost because it was out of circulation; it was not rendering any positive service for good. Many, many scriptures point out that the sin of all sins is that of uselessness. When you examine the parables of Jesus, you notice that they were not offered against positive wrongs so much as they were offered against uselessness.

What about the parable of the Good Samaritan? You remember the Priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side and gave no aid to the wounded traveler in the ditch by the side of the road. What did the Priest and the Levite do that was wrong? How were they such great sinners? It was not so much that they did things that were wrong as it was their failure to do what was right.

What about the parable of the 10 virgins; five were foolish. Why were these five foolish virgins wrong? What was their sin that they had committed. They had not done something positively wrong. It was their failure to do what was right. They failed to make preparation for the coming of the bridegroom and their lamps were not trimmed.

What about the parable of the man who was rich, and so he tore down his barns in order to build larger barns, to hold more grain. What was the sin that he was guilty of? It was not that he had committed some overt action; he had not done something so terrible; it was the fact that he was selfish and he was simply storing up more goods that he might be richer. He was not using anything for the good of mankind.

What about the parable of the talents? The one man who had the one talent - what did he do that was so terrible? He did not commit some awful sin; it was the fact that he took that one talent and buried it in the ground and it became useless. He just didn't do anything and that was his great sin. Don't you see the point?

There are many church members who are lost like a coin. They haven't done anything wrong and they aren't doing anything wrong. They don't go out and get drunk; they go out and commit murder; they don't go out and steal from anyone; they're not trying to take away somebody's wife or husband. They're not doing any bad sin like this; they are out of circulation, and maybe it's not even through any fault of their own. We are living in a very mobile society, and people's jobs often transfer them from one community to another. So it may be that the person who was very active in the home church suddenly finds himself moved into a new community through no fault of his own. And what happens? Well, he looks around and he visits this church and he visits that church and he begins to drift here and there and he is always a visitor and he never finds a church to take the place of his home church. Consequently his talents are not being used for the Lord and as he becomes a drifter he begins to lose faith. He doesn't intend for anything to go wrong but the fact remains that eventually a Christian without a home church becomes a member out of circulation and so he becomes lost, just like the woman lost her silver coin.

Too many times we have the wrong attitude when it comes to church work. Must I do this? And must I do that? Suppose that young people viewed marriage like that? Suppose that every

young girl when she reached marriageable age would say, "Must I wash the bottles?" "Must I prepare the baby's formula?" "Must I wash the diapers and disinfect them?" "Must I prepare three meals a day?" "Must I clean the house? Must I do this and that?" Why, I doubt that there would be any more marriages if young girls looked at it like that. But when they are young and starry-eyed, they think, my it would be such a pleasure to wash those bottles and diapers, and clean house and do everything like that. I love this boy so much that I'd be willing to do anything for him. Now of course if she could travel down the road about 50 years and then look back, maybe it wouldn't seem so great. So nobody would ever get married, but people have faith in each other and they love one another. So they are willing to make these sacrifices and they don't even consider them a sacrifice because of love.

And that's the way it is with the church. Those who really love Jesus don't consider anything that we do a sacrifice. If we have to drive a few miles to get to the worship service; that's all right because we love Jesus and it's such a joy to be with God's people. If we have to come to the church building and mow the grass or clean up things or perform some positive service in the name of Christ, it's not a drudgery. If we're called upon to go by and pick up a neighbor who doesn't have a ride, we're glad to do that. Anything that can be done in the name of Jesus is pure joy to the Christian who is in love with his Lord.

But just let a Christian get to drifting; just let a Christian get out of circulation for a little while and what happens? Everything becomes drudgery. Then once the Christian has lost his first love, he begins to question: "Must I go to church on Sunday night? Must I go to prayer meeting on Wednesday night? Must I go to Sunday School? Must I go calling? Must I do this or that?" Oh, it makes quite a difference, doesn't it - when it comes right down to what our real motive is. If our motive is to do whatever we do because we love Jesus then that takes away the drudgery that would otherwise be attached to Christianity.

III. Now in the third place Jesus said that some people are lost like the boy who went into the far country. His is the obvious type of "lostness." This young man said to his father, "Give me what's mine and let me go." And so the father divided his living and the young man took his inheritance and he went away into a far country and there he lived with the harlots and he wasted everything that he had in riotous and drunken living. And of course it didn't take long before his pockets were empty and he was hungry; he couldn't find a job and he had no friends. Now this prodigal boy is the obvious type of a lost sinner. He wasted his manhood, his substance, his integrity and all that he had in riotous living. We do not have to say anything about this type of a lost sinner. All around us, we have people like the prodigal son who are lost in their sins. Certainly they know it and we know it - everybody knows that they need a Savior - Jesus Christ. And constantly we need to be reaching out to this type of person to bring them to Jesus that they might be saved from their sins that they might have a better life here as well as eternal life hereafter.

IV. But now let us come to that fourth type of lost person. And I must say that I have never heard any preacher preach on this parable. Neither have I ever heard a preacher preach about this kind of a lost person. But I think maybe this is the most important part of the 15th chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

THE LOST ELDER BROTHER

What about the lost elder brother who stayed at home? He never did do anything wrong. He was right there with his mother and dad all the time. He had his eye on the business. He took care of everything. He was just a perfect boy - in every respect of the word. But then when his younger brother came home - the prodigal - what happened? Oh my, the elder brother was really upset - jealous! He spoke to his father and said, "You never did kill a fatted calf for me! Why, here I've stayed home all these years and I've served you and I've obeyed you. I've always done

everything that you wanted me to do. You gave me no party; there was no rejoicing. I don't understand it. Here my young brother has been out gambling and drinking and living with wild women and the minute he comes home after he has disgraced the family, you give this big party and welcome him."

What did the father say? He said, "Son, you've been with me every day; your mother and I love you. Everything we have belongs to you. You've pleased us so much by your life and by your actions, but son, it is right that we have a party and rejoice when your brother comes back home because he was lost and now he's found; he was dead and now he is alive."

Now what was wrong with that older brother who was also lost? You see, he was lost because he was terribly out of sympathy with his father and mother and his younger brother. He did not grieve over the lost condition of his younger brother and neither did he forgive the younger brother when he came back home. I'm afraid that this may apply to a great many church members.

The Old Ferry Boat Captain

Years ago when I was a student in Bible College in Cincinnati, Ohio, my Bible College professors used to tell stories about a famous evangelist of another generation, whose name was Knowles Shaw. Knowles Shaw was one of the greatest evangelists that the Christian Church has ever known. On one occasion he was living in Cincinnati, and holding a revival meeting across the river in Kentucky.

Every afternoon Knowles Shaw went down to Anderson Ferry and caught the ferry boat to cross the Ohio River to get to his preaching appointment in Kentucky, just across from Cincinnati. The reason he took the ferry boat was because they did not have a big, modern bridge there, as they do today.

The first day that Knowles Shaw got on that ferry boat he noticed that the ferryman was an old, drunken, whiskey-drinking wretch of a man. He had no hat and his hair was just blown every which direction. It was dirty and matted. His whole body was filthy; he was dressed in rags, and he was very repulsive to be around. It just so happened that there were very few people on board the ferry boat, so Knowles Shaw struck up a conversation with this ferry boat captain. He said, "What's your name?"

And the old drunken wretch replied, "My name is Blue Dick the Ferryman." Knowles Shaw said, "Well, I perceive that is your nickname, but I want to know what is your real name?" The ferry boat captain looked at him and he said, "Sir, it has been so many years since anybody called me by my real name that I don't even know what my real name is. I'm just Blue Dick the Ferryman." Knowles Shaw without making another comment just looked right in the eyes of the ferry boat captain and he said, "Why don't you stop drinking whiskey?" Well, the ferry boat captain straightened himself up and looked at him and said, "Because I can't, that's why." And Knowles Shaw said, "Yes, you can." Tears came into the eyes of the old ferry boat captain.

He said, "Mister, do you really think I could stop drinking after all of these years?" And Knowles Shaw said, "Blue Dick do you have a wife or children?" And when he asked that question, the poor old captain just broke down and wept like a baby. Well of course that opened the way for a real heartfelt conversation. Knowles Shaw revealed to the ferry boat captain that he was a preacher of the Gospel and was holding a revival meeting just a short distance from the place where the ferry boat docked. And he said, "I want you to come to the services and hear me preach the Word of God." The old ferry boat captain made a lot of excuses and so Knowles Shaw went his way.

Every day he rode that ferry back and forth from Cincinnati and of course each day he kept witnessing to the ferry boat captain. Finally one night when Knowles Shaw stood up to preach in that little Christian Church there in that Kentucky village, he looked out into the congregation and much to his amazement and happy surprise, there sat Blue Dick the Ferryman. Knowles Shaw welcomed him warmly to the service, much to the disappointment and chagrin of the congregation. Oh my, they began to complain loudly. Some members of the church came to him following the service and they said, "We don't want trash like that in our church. Mr. Shaw you're going to ruin our church by bringing in a whiskey-drinking ferry boat captain like that."

But Knowles Shaw paid no attention to these hypocritical members of the congregation. He just continued to preach the Word of God and every day he continued to invite the ferry boat captain, and night after night the captain attended the services and he heard Knowles Shaw talk about how God loves all sinners and wants to forgive everybody of their sins. Finally the ferry boat captain realized that God loved him; so one night when the invitation was extended, Blue Dick the Ferryman came down to the front and confessed the name of Jesus and was baptized into Christ. Well the church almost went up into smoke. There were lots of objections. People said, "Well it won't amount to a hill of beans. That fellow will backslide before you even get across the ferry boat the last night of the revival meeting."

Well, Blue Dick the Ferryman was so transformed by his conversion to Jesus Christ that he soon dispelled all of the doubts of the members of that congregation. He lived such a noble exemplary life for Jesus that in a few short years he became one of the most respected leaders of that congregation. Twenty years later that same church called Knowles Shaw to return for another revival meeting. When Knowles Shaw the evangelist stepped off the train at the railroad station in Cincinnati, who should greet him - the first one to greet him - none other than Blue Dick the Ferryman. As he shook hands with Brother Knowles Shaw he said, "I want to invite you to come to my home and stay with my family; sleep in our house and eat in our house while you are holding the revival meeting in our church." And Knowles Shaw discovered that Blue Dick the Ferryman had been transformed into one of the deacons of the congregation. When he stepped into his home he found a happy, loving wife and wonderful, loving children, and old Blue Dick the Ferryman said, "Brother Shaw, I want us to all get down on our knees before we say a word and I just want you to thank God that he saved an old drunken sot like me and changed my life as He has done."

WHO ARE THE LOST?

Oh, dear friends, who are the lost? The Bible records as lost every loveless soul in the church who refuses to forgive those whom God has forgiven. I think this is a good time for us to look within our own souls. Are we, ourselves, willing to love everybody and forgive everybody, even as God is willing to forgive? If not, we ourselves are lost because of our lovelessness.

How do we get lost?

Well, some people get lost like a **sheep**. Now that sheep did not get angry at the shepherd; he did not get angry at the flock. He just became careless and silly. Keeping his head down he just chewed on one tuft of grass after another and just kept wandering around until he was completely lost. And that's exactly what we sometimes do as people. We just keep our head down and we drift from one community to another and one church to another and the first thing you know we find ourselves totally lost - outside of the church - not even a member anywhere. What

happened? We became careless and we drifted.

Some people become lost like a **coin**. No how did that woman lose the coin? Did it slip out of her pocketbook? Did she have a hole in the pocket of her dress and it dropped through that hole? Was she careless? Did she allow it to slip through her fingers? We don't know exactly how it happened, but the coin did become lost. And many times we are lost like a coin. We can't really explain how it happened, but it did happen, and we find ourselves out of our right relationship.

Some people get lost like the **prodigal**. Now this was willful. It was on purpose. He made up his mind - I want to get away from Dad and Mom, away from home. I want to go out and do what I want to do. And many, many times people just simply make up their minds that they are going to go out in the world and become a sinner, just like the prodigal. So they become lost.

But dear friends, many times we find ourselves in the position of the **elder brother**. Why are we in the church? Why are we trying to live for God? Why do we read the Bible? Why do we pray? Why did this elder brother stay at home? Well apparently he thought it was a better business deal to stay at home with his parents and get everything when they died, than to go off like the prodigal did. So his whole attitude was wrong - dead wrong. Maybe that is what has been wrong with us. Maybe we have become lost like the elder brother because we haven't been coming to church and worshipping God and studying His Word and praying with the right attitude.

Finally, let us ask ourselves what is the **attitude of God toward those who are lost**? I believe that the attitude of God can be described as the same attitude that Luther Burbank had. Luther Burbank was once quoted as saying, "Every weed is a possible flower, and the only reason that the old burr weed doesn't have beautiful blossoms instead of cockleburs is because nobody ever gave it a chance." That's the attitude of God toward every lost person. God believes that every sinner can become a saint; every coward can become a hero, and every defeat can be turned into a victory.

Antonio Stradivarius

Years ago, there lived in Italy a young boy named Tony. Tony dearly loved music, and he attended every free musical concert in the town. He loved singing, especially. But try as he would, Tony could not sing because he could not carry a tune. This disturbed the boy greatly. One day he was talking to the old village violin maker, telling him about his love for music and how he was so grieved because he was unable to sing. And the village violin maker said, "Tony, sometimes you have to express music with your hands, or sometimes you have to express music with your eyes. Sometimes you express music through your feet." He said, "You see the important thing about music is to have it in your heart, and if you have music in your heart you're going to find some way to express it. As for me, I express it with my hands by making violins that others can play upon."

Well that gave Antonio Stradivarius the idea that shaped the rest of his life. Antonio Stradivarius began to carve violins when he was a young man and he carved them his entire lifetime. He lived to be 93 years old. During his long lifetime he carved more than one thousand violins; 50 cellos and several more violas. In the world today, there are remaining over 500 Stradivarius violins. They are so valuable, so costly, that no one can purchase them. Even if you were a millionaire, it would do you no good to offer because those who own these will not sell them at any price. You see, Antonio Stradivarius made his violins to a degree of perfection that nobody, right up to this moment, has been able to duplicate his effort. Consequently, his

instruments are beyond price. He had the music in his heart and he expressed it with his hands in a way that nobody else can ever do.

Dear friends, that's what we must do with Jesus. We must have Jesus in our hearts first of all. It's going to be impossible to express Jesus in our Lives; it's going to be impossible to express Jesus in our words; it's going to be impossible to express Jesus in our deeds; unless we first of all have him in our heart as our Savior. Now how do you let Jesus into your heart? Well, you must open the door; you must invite him in. You must make that decision to let Jesus be your Savior. And you must be willing to repent of your sins and to come forth to stand before everybody and say, "I do believe that Jesus is the Son of God." And if you're willing to confess Him with your mouth because He is in your heart, then you will be buried with Him in Christian baptism and Jesus will wash away all of your sins and you will begin a new life. You will find that as a saved person, you will then be able to express Christ through your life, because you see, He will be dwelling in your heart.

Would you make that decision this morning to open your heart's door and let Jesus in? I know that there are many in this audience who need to make that all-important decision. You're invited to come as we stand together and sing the invitation. We pray you'll come, right on the first verse.

Wm. White