

ALOST AND FOUND@
 Evangelist Johnnie Lavender
 Luke 15:3-24

I believe that, at one and the same time, this parable is both tragic and beautiful. It is tragic in its presentation of the awful heinousness of sin. And, it is beautiful in its portrayal of the wondrous, matchless, glorious, amazing love of God.

It is real life. No other story more instantly touches the nerve of human experience. Let it be read without comment or explanation, and it conquers us. Its vivid strokes have caught the course of human history in its decadence. It paints a graphic picture of the patient, persistent, perfect love of God, and the presence of the dire need of derelict humanity with such intensity that the most calloused sinner is shaken out of his indifference and moved to his repentance.

The boy who has turned his life into a fleshy mess is condemned by it and saved. The girl who has broken the irrevocable laws of God, is convicted by it and born again. The mother, father, and husband or wife who has played fast and loose with the commandments of Christ is rebuked by it and redeemed. Indeed, this is truly one of the greatest passages of scripture ever given.

It speaks of repentance. And what is repentance? Well, it is not sorrow for sin. If so, all of us have repented. For there isn't one of us who is bound by a fault or weakened by a failing, who has not had at sometime a sense of sorrow for some sin. We may have cried, with our hearts almost breaking, "Oh, that I might be saved!" But that is not repentance.

Repentance is not remorse on account of sin. If so, then again, all of us have repented. Day after day we may have walked the streets, and night after night we may have tossed restlessly on our beds crying, "Oh, my God, my sin, my sin!" But that is not repentance.

Repentance *does* involve a sense of sorrow for sin. It *does* involve the crushing effect of remorse

on account of sin. But, in addition to this, repentance is saying, **A**With the help of God I will turn away from sin!**@** Repentance is doing an about-face and turning from sin to God.

This parable speaks of repentance. It deals with three aspects of repentance, and I want you to see them with me tonight. First of all, it speaks of--

The Need for Repentance

Sin is the universal difficulty of man and of God. It is in every home, in every heart and in every life. Its progress is like the trail of a serpent. You find it upon every page of the Old Testament, upon every page of the New Testament, and in every story of history.

There is not a man, woman, boy or girl upon the face of the earth who is free from its deadly venom. For my Bible tells me, **A**All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.**@** And, as a result of sin, people are lost.

Through Sheer Stupidity

This parable tells us that some people are lost as the sheep were lost, through sheer stupidity. You know, a sheep is one of the most stupid creatures God ever made. A sheep goes anywhere it finds a gap. It doesn't stop to think. It can't think. A gap appears in the fence and the sheep goes through it, wandering farther and farther into the country, until it is lost and cannot find its way back.

A sheep does not have a mind of its own. It goes along with the crowd. If a shepherd can find a lead sheep and attach a bell to it, the rest of the sheep will follow after it. And, according to Jesus, some people are like that. They are like sheep in that they do not have a mind of their own. Desiring social approval, afraid of offending someone, they meekly play along with the crowd.

They don't curse God. In fact, they don't even give God a second thought. Like sheep, they follow after the zest of the moment. This fleeting pleasure. This passing thrill. This temporary

fancy. And, as a result, they are lost. Not from viciousness or deliberate choice, but from weak will and heedlessness. They are unaware of the dangers lurking about them. They refuse to recognize the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and they are lost, through sheer stupidity.

Through the Carelessness of Others

Our text also tells us some people are lost as the coin was lost, through the carelessness of others. In this instance, the fault was with the hand and not with the coin. All about us there are people like that. People who are lost through the carelessness and indifference of others.

During the last few months of my seminary training, I worked afternoons and evenings at a service station to put my wife and myself through school. One night about a quarter to nine as I was preparing to close up, two little boys about nine and twelve came into the station and asked me to fix their bike.

I was surprised at their being out on the streets alone at that hour of the night and inquired about their parents. The older boy, who was the spokesman of the two, explained that they hadn't seen their father for many months. He had a drinking problem and one night, in a drunken stupor, he walked out the front door and never came back again.

"What about your mother?" I asked. "Isn't she home?" The smaller of the two boys started to cry, but his older brother squared his shoulders and looked me directly in the eye. "Yeah, mister. She's home. She's in bed with a sailor!"

I don't know what you believe, but I believe those two little boys were lost. Lost through the carelessness of a drunken father and a harlot mother. You see, I'm just old-fashioned enough to believe when God gives a man or a woman a little bundle of life for their very own, he expects them to be a father or mother to it. If that child is not raised in the fear and admonition of God, I believe our Lord will hold those parents accountable for that. And it's tragic to contemplate the fact that there are many boys and girls in this city who are lost through the carelessness and

spiritual indifference of another.

But that is not the main reason for humanity's lostness. I am convinced, and I believe the Bible teaches that the vast majority, the overwhelming mass of men and women who are lost today are lost as the son was lost.

Through Deliberate Choice

Oh, some are lost as the sheep are lost, through sheer stupidity, but their number is few. Some are lost as the coin was lost, through the carelessness of another, but they are not that many. The vast majority of people are lost as the son was lost, through deliberate choice.

Like the prodigal son, they know the basic requirements of God. They've heard them at home, at school, and from the pulpit. They've read them in the Bible. And yet, knowing God's will for their lives, they persist in disregarding it. They are like the prodigal son. They rebel against restriction and against restraint. They believe the devil's lie that there is freedom and liberty away from God and Christ and the church.

They go into the far country. They say, "Let's eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." They go, and they are lost! Some people seem to believe they can destroy God's laws by denying them. But no one has ever succeeded in doing that. A person can demonstrate his or her freedom by jumping off a ten-story building, but the law of gravity won't be broken. That person will be broken *on* the law of gravity. And just as there are physical laws, so, too, there are spiritual laws and one of them is this: "The wages of sin is death."

My friend, you can deny it. You can ignore it. You can become a human battering ram and throw yourself against it again and again in an attempt to annihilate it, but that law will not be broken. You will be broken *on* that law. For it was set down before the beginning of time, "The wages of sin is death."

My friend, listen to me. If you were outside of Christ tonight, you were lost. Perhaps you are

lost as the sheep was lost. You have been heedless, unconcerned, unaware of the dangers and the exceeding sinfulness of sin. You have followed along with the crowd and it has brought you nothing but heartaches.

Perhaps you are lost as the coin was lost, through the carelessness of another. What you are is not altogether your own fault. You've been more sinned against than sinning.

But, in all probability, if you are lost tonight, it is because you were like the prodigal son. You are lost as a result of your own deliberate choice.

But whatever the reason, whatever the cause, whatever the circumstance, if you don't know Christ as your personal Savior, and if you have never experienced the miracle of salvation in your own heart and life, if you have never been born again, you are lost! You are doomed. You are bound for eternity without God, *unless* you heed God's call to repentance.

Beloved, God's love, God's mercy, God's grace expresses itself in many ways. In his longing to see people saved, God gave the world his son. Through the cross of Christ, God's love plumbed the depths of hell, caught the guilty sinner up, and gave him hope! The hope of redeeming his lost position before a righteous God.

Throughout the last two thousand years since that awful experience of Calvary, divine love has visited itself upon people in various and sundry ways, pleading with them to repent of their sins, turn from their evil ways and accept the death of Christ upon the cross as the only, all-sufficient payment for their debt of sin.

Our text tells us that sometimes God's love becomes --

A Good Shepherd.

Going out into the night. Crossing the rugged mountainsides. Searching along rocky paths and

through thorns and thistles. Seeking, seeking, seeking, ever seeking the poor lost sheep. As that beloved old hymn puts it,

None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through
Ere he found the sheep that was lost. @

I say to you, my friends, that's God! The good shepherd, seeking out the poor lost sinner, that he or she might be returned to the safety of the fold.

And then, our text tells us that sometimes God's love becomes--

A Humble Sweeper Woman.

Brushing away the cobwebs. Sweeping out the dust and dirt that have crept into the corner of our lives. Cleaning up the windows of our soul so the light of God's love can shine in. Diligently searching, searching, calling people to repentance.

God does this in so many ways.

He calls people through the influence of their homes.

He calls them through the memory of their mother's prayers.

He calls them through the voice of their conscience.

He calls them through the testimony of a godly wife.

He calls them through the message of a faithful preacher.

He calls them through the witness of some saintly Christian.

He calls them through the music of some gospel song.

In a thousand and more ways, God searches out the seeking sinner and convicts him of his sin and need of a Savior urging him to repent.

Yes, that's God. God, the good shepherd, seeking the poor sinner, who is lost in the darkness of

night. God, the humble sweeper woman, feverishly searching for the precious soul that has lost its identity in the dirt and filth of the world. Indeed, God uses every possible means to bring a sinner to repentance.

But when these gentle methods fail, when people in their contempt for righteousness persist in trampling his Son under their feet, when they continue to spurn his tender overtures of love, when every other conceivable means of winning them has been tried and failed, then God in his love and mercy and infinite wisdom has but one course left to take. He speaks through the voice of --

A Famine.

Oh, my friends, I urge you, don't make God go that far. Don't make God send a famine. Forsake your sin. Turn from your evil ways. Repent and be saved before God resorts to allowing a famine, in one last effort to redeem you.

Oh, believe me! With all my heart I preach it to you. If God sends a famine, it will completely crush you. It will rob you of everything you cherish. It may break your body. It may take your home. It may claim your loved ones. It may cost you your job. I don't know when or how it will hit you, but I do know this: it will leave you absolutely destitute, broken and empty. For God who made the heavens and the earth, believes there is no price too great to be paid for your eternal soul to be saved. Your salvation cost God his son. I pray that it may never cost you yours.

My sermon is nearly done, and you know I have preached the truth. You know you are lost. You know you need a Savior. And, once again, you have heard God's call of repentance. You have heard it from my lips. You have heard it from the music which has been sung. You've heard it, as the Holy Spirit has been knocking at the door of your heart throughout this service, pleading for admission. Oh, my friend, won't you come? Won't you heed the call? Say, **A Yes** to God's gentle overture of love, that you might enter into --

The Joyous Results of Repentance.

I wish I had another hour so I could tell you about the glorious provisions Christ has prepared for those who are his own. Let me list just four of them.

First, if you receive Jesus Christ tonight there will be **rejoicing** in heaven. Think of it. If you come tonight, the hosts of heaven will break into raptures of song. The vast armies of the redeemed who are already in glory will join in shouting hosannas to the King, for it is written, **A**There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God, over *one* sinner that repents.@

Second, there will be the **removal** of God's condemnation upon your sin. You will be washed in the blood of the lamb. Your garments will be made spotless, your record clean.

Third, **resources** will be placed in your hands to help you combat and overcome the power of sin in this present life.

And then, fourth, not only will there be rejoicing in heaven, removal of the condemnation of your sin, and resources placed in your hands to help you live victoriously here and now, there will be ultimate and eventual **release** from this present wicked world, when you will go to dwell forever in the mansions of glory which Christ has prepared for his own. All this and more, God has prepared for you if you only repent. Do it tonight. **A**Come! Taste and see that the Lord is good!@