

When God Cleans House

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Thank you so much. It's a certainly privilege and my joy to be here with you. And again, let me add my welcome to those of you that are here tonight. If you have a copy of God's Word, let me invite you to open to Luke 15, and we're going to look primarily at verses eight through ten. But I'm going to go back and begin reading at verse one.

So, if you will read along with me from Luke chapter 15, verse one.

Now they are for the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable. What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it.

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing, and when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one center who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance or what woman having ten silver coins if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it.

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I have lost. Just so I tell you, there's joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of our God will stand forever. Will you pray with me?

Father we ask that you would open the eyes and minds and ears of our hearts, that we might see great things from your word and receive understanding that your Holy Spirit would confront and comfort us tonight as we look at these words of our Savior Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, the year was 1989, and in the country of Armenia, there was an 8.2 earthquake that killed more than 30,000 people in less than 4 minutes. There was a man whose son had gone to school that morning and as the earthquake subsided and he gathered his wits about him he ran to the place where he knew his son was to be in school. And as he approached what was only a pile of rubble, certainly fear and all the emotions that a father could have over a son who appeared to be lost. He remembered in that moment a promise that he made to his son. No matter what, I will always be there for you. As he looked at the pile of debris that was once the school, it certainly looked hopeless. But he kept remembering his commitment to his son.

I'll ask you this question to ponder, and that is this How do we think about something that is lost? The answer to that question is going to depend entirely upon our relationship to the lost item, how we feel about something that's lost means something different for all of us, depending on our relationship to that which is lost. This section of Luke's gospel, concluding with perhaps the most recognizable parable in the Bible, pulls this question into distilled clarity for us.

How do we think about something that is lost? What I'd like us to put our mind to this evening is this thought -- that all of heaven rejoices when sinners repent. Let's take a minute and look at the context here. As we get going, we're going to focus our time really on verses 8 to 10 but I do want to spend just a few minutes looking at these first seven verses before we move into the heart of our time together. These first two stories that Jesus tells are illustrative. They are setting the stage actually for the final section - the longer narrative that we know is the prodigal son and in Luke's style he provides the setting for these parables that are a frequent point of contention. If you look back at verse one very subtly now, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Jesus. The Pharisees, we see in verse two, and scribes rumbled against a class of people who were known as tax collectors and sinners. And it's here where we come to understand the purpose of the parables. We are seeing the people who are lost, and Jesus goes on. He illustrates it first by introducing us to the lost sheep. Now sheep are hopelessly dumb animals from what I've been told. We had cows. We didn't do sheep. But I've been told by a friend of mine who actually was a shepherd in New Zealand that sheep are awfully dumb animals. We have one of those in our house. Her name is Olive. We rescued her about a year ago. She's a little cocker spaniel mix, we think. And even just last night, as we were getting on to her about doing something that she wasn't supposed to do in the house and Olive just sort of traipses away, not paying any attention to the one who's scolding her. And you just think, okay, I get it, you're in your own world -- and that's how sheep live. They're really great at finding ways to get lost, to get into trouble and even to die. If we look back at verse one, we see a class of people in the tax collectors and the sinners who were really great at finding ways to get lost, really great at finding ways to get into trouble, and yes, even to die. But they were rejected by the religious. This class of people were rejected by the religious, both the leaders and the pious tax collectors. I don't know that we really need to say a whole lot about how people feel about tax collectors, so I'm just going to move on from that point and talk about the sinners. The sinners who the Bible describes.

This is actually what the word connotes is that they are complete moral failures, complete moral failures, and they were probably the life of the party. So we often think of these sinners when we get them in our mind as they're dusty and dirty and they're awful and they're bad. But actually Jesus gets in trouble with these guys more than once by reputation, because they were the party people. They were the people that everybody wanted to be with. They had a good time in life and entertaining the company of this group was actually really scandalous. In Matthew 11: 19, Jesus is confronted again by this same group, the scribes and the Pharisees who were challenging him and not directly they go to his disciples and they say, why does your

master, why does your teacher, why does your rabbi eat with these people? Why does he receive tax collectors and sinners? He shouldn't. And Jesus and Matthew 11 goes on to talk about rebuking these scribes and these Pharisees, these religious leaders, by saying, John came to you as a prophet and you complained that he played a dirge. he's too mooney. He's really kind of an Eyore. But Jesus comes and he's embracing the tax collectors and the sinners and he's eating with them and he's at their parties and you're saying he's too peppy. He's like Tigger - he needs to calm down. He says, It doesn't really matter, guys, which way it goes, because the issue is not style. It's not whether you're Eyore type or a Tigger type for the scribes and the Pharisees. What Jesus wanted them to understand is it was a hard issue. You have a problem with these people, not what they're doing.

Jesus says, You accuse me of being a tax collector. Ah, sorry. You accuse me of being a drunk and a glutton which if you go back into Deuteronomy 21, Moses gave us in the law. If your son is a glutton and a drunk, you're to bring him before the elders of the gate and to confront him and have him stoned. Jesus says, I know you want me dead, but I came to be with these people.

I ask you another question. Who are the sheep in your life? Who are the lost sheep? The moral degenerates? Those who have made an art of getting lost, of getting into trouble. Who are they? I want to emphasize this next idea is who are the people in your life, whether they are near to you or they are far from you? It may not be that they are in close proximity. It may not be that you have a relationship with them. But when we talk about the sheep who have wandered and the sinners and the tax collectors, the morally bankrupt people, you have a picture in your mind. We all do. So who are they? Who are the people in your life that someone might get mad if Jesus invited them to dinner? Jesus came for those people. He came for them.

Leon Morris, in a commentary, says, We see here a distinctive and revolutionary note. God actively seeks out sinners and he brings them home. The rabbis agreed that God would welcome the penitent sinner, but it is a new idea. And I put a note here to the rabbis, not to God. It is a new idea that God is a seeking God and a God who takes the initiative.

Let's talk about the story of the prodigal son for just a minute, which concludes this chapter, The Lost Sheep is often cited by evangelists. Remember, Jesus left the 99. You should. And he ran to the son. He ran after the one. And so of course, this is true. And we ought to embrace that. We ought to hold that same posture in our hearts towards those who stray. But in both the introductory scenario and the story of the prodigal son, we overlooked one other facet of lostness, and that's the closeness of the coin. So Jesus tells the story of two different types of being lost here. One is the lostness of straying, and one is the lostness of staying. There's no discussion of how the coin became lost. The explanation of a sheep that wandered is, you know, it wandered of its own volition. It makes sense. It's a dumb animal and it makes poor choices. But how does a coin become lost? A one study concluded that the average person misplaces nine items a day. So you can use that as your bar for how you're doing in you're losing things. The average person misplace is nine items a day and spends an average of 15 minutes looking for lost items. That same study also pointed out that men were more likely to lose things than

women. Now I have to confess to you, that felt totally gratuitous when I read that -- until this morning when I was getting dressed in the dark about 430, getting ready to hop the airplane to come to Birmingham, and my sweet wife rolls over and she says, do you have your toothbrush? You have your socks? You have your jacket? You have the clothes that were in the dryer? Do you have your Bible? Yes, ma'am to all of the above. And so as I'm gathering all of my belongings and trying not to wake the house, I go to the Austin Airport, hop on my plane to Dallas, and we're about 10 minutes from LA Field and I have suddenly awakened from my dozing cat nap to immediately think I have forgotten something. I opened my bag and realized that the Bible that I told her I had, I did not have. So when we landed, I texted and said I forgot my Bible. Babe, I even reminded you! It felt gratuitous. But it's not.

How do you lose a coin? Maybe fell out of a bag, got knocked off a table. It's possible that this woman had a necklace with ten coins on it and one slipped off. We don't know. But unlike the sheep who strayed on its own, the coin never left the house. Yeah. Don't miss this, friends. It remained lost from its owner. It was just as lost as the sheep. Now, the ten coins, one commentator points out, may represent a poor woman savings or something. They may have been strung together as an ornament. But that point is really not significant. Either way, the loss of a coin would be a serious matter for a poor woman. And not only that, it was a 10th of her savings. How many of you today would be scrounging, you know, scrambling if you lost a 10th of your savings? And the word here that is translated, the coin was lost. It's the word for ruin and destruction. So this coin, it's not imminent danger. The danger is already gone. The coin is lost. It's destroyed already.

So imagine I had a seminary professor who loved to find Roman coins. The amazing thing about these coins is they're brown. And if you were to drop one in the dirt, it would very easily be lost. So this woman drops a 10th of her life savings, potentially in the dirt in her home, where it's dark. And, you know, they didn't have mag lights or whatever it is, you know, that can like land planes in your basement. She had a tiny little oil lamp, and that oil would have been incredibly expensive to put in that little lamp. And then she would have lit that lamp and she would have gone around or put it up in a high place in the house so that it gives out a little bit of light and sweep and sweep and sweep. Have you ever swept dirt in dirt?

But tirelessly, she looks he noticed that the coin, which never left the house, was no less, lost its condition, no less serious, no less perilous than the sheep who had wandered away. And what we need to see there friends is that whether you wandered away or you were lost in the house, your condition, apart from Jesus, is the exact same.

Lost and without hope.

But these stories end well, don't they? The man finds the sheep, the woman finds her coin. And so we see what it is to be found. This woman swept her house. She swept the dirt floors. She found the coin. There was no resting until she found exactly what she was looking for.

Friends, we have a God who cleans house. We have a God who is relentless in his pursuit of us. A God who left no stone unturned in his search and recovery mission. And that same God is here, sweeping the streets of Birmingham, sweeping the halls of your home and your heart, leaving no stone unturned and sparing no expense.

Let's go back to Leon Morris, who said this among the rabbinic writings there is the lost coin motif, but it's used very differently. If a man keeps seeking for a lost coin. This is what the rabbis say, much more should he seek for the law. There is no rabbinic equivalent to God's seeking of sinners. And so we spot the theme of our texts that God seeks and saves the lost, whether perceptibly like lost sinners or forgotten in the dust, like a misplaced coin.

Let's step back to Armenia just for a moment. 1989, the father standing in the rubble that was once a school, searching for his son, remembering the commitment he made to his son. I will always be there for you. He began to concentrate on where he walked his son to class each morning, remembering his son's classroom would be in the back right corner of the building.

And he rushed there and he started digging through the rubble. No length, too great to find his son.

You know, what is it to be found? What is it to be found? We've talked about the loss in this. Let's talk about the foundness. To be found is to be brought into the possession of the seeker.

For the sheep, it was the possession of the shepherd for the coin. The possession of the woman. How does this happen? God seeking us and our responding in faith and repentance - to be found is to be, is to know that Jesus was and is pursuing us like the Hound of Heaven. Our shorter catechism asks the question, How does Jesus execute the office of a king? And the answer that comes back to that is that he executes that office in subduing us, seeking us, chasing us down in subduing us to himself and ruling and defending us and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies. I love the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism. This is what is your only hope in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong in body and soul, both in life and death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sin with this precious blood and has set me free from the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way. He keeps me, he finds me, he holds me. I'm never out of his possession. He keeps me in such a way that without the will of my Heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head. And indeed all things must work together for my salvation. And therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily, willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Jesus keeps us when He finds us, there's no givebacks. But what is it to repent? Because that's where the joy comes from. What is it to repent? One friend of mine put it this way - I love this. Repentance is coming to agree with God that he is right and we are not. And what's so great about that is when you look at the biblical word for repentance, it's two Greek words that are smashed together, a compound, Greek word that literally means change mind. We are to change our minds about God, and we are to come in our minds to agree with what God says about himself and about us, about the world around us, and how it is that we are to live in it.

Romans 12:1-2 not be conformed any longer. The pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And there's joy in heaven when people repent, when they change their minds to come into agreement with God. That's our final point. Here is the joy, the joy that we see. You know, there's an assumption probably because of how the story of the prodigal son ends, that the shepherd and the woman both throw parties upon finding their respective lost items. It's not out of the question. Verse nine specifically calls out that the woman summoned together her friends. So it's very possible that she had a party regardless. She spent a lot of money burning the oil to try and find this coin. But there's a story that a commentator shares, that there was a boy in a confirmation class that when he heard this parable, he says, what a dumb woman. She spent more on the party than that coin was worth. Exactly. See, that's the lavishness of grace. That's the scandalous nature of God's love. From an economic point of view, the woman's response is folly. The parable is not about economics, though. It's about God's grace and perhaps the folly of His grace that seeks the lost until they are found, and once they're found, celebrates their recovery in abandon.

The joy of God has no price tag. There's rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. A great chasm lies between the Pharisees and the Kingdom of God at this point. They complain when they see Jesus with many sinners and tax collectors, yet all of heaven rejoices when one of them repents. So again, I'll ask a question.

Are you grumbling? Go back in your mind to the people that you think maybe are irredeemable and how would you respond should they change their mind about God? All of heaven rejoices when sinners repent and the effect of repentance we see from Psalm 32. We won't go there right now, but we are blessed when our sin is covered. The Lord does not count iniquity. There's despair when we conceal sin, there's freedom with repentance. John Chrysostom says, let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again for forgiveness, has risen from the grave.

Let's bring this home as we think about applying this text to our lives, we need to begin with ourselves.

And for most of us in this room, there may be a stray sheep here and there, but more likely than not, our lostness looks more like the coin. Sometimes we don't even realize it.

Where are you in disagreement with God? Where are you in disagreement with God?

You know, again, in a crowd like this, we're going to look more like the coin. And so the question that we have to ask is where do I need to come under the alignment of God's word? Is it how you view and think about yourself? Friend, have you been found? I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind. But now I see. If you've been found friends, heaven rejoiced and heaven continues rejoicing every time you come to say yes, Lord. And if you've been found, let it fill your soul with contagious, infectious, exuberant joy. Not only do we need to think about how to think about ourselves, but how do you view and think about other people? Are they -- And we'll do the air quote thing, right? Are they whoever they are for you? Are they irredeemable? Are they unsolvable or are they outside?

God. Would be certainly pleased if they would repent and come home. But do you see them instead, not as projects to be fixed, but as people for whom Jesus died. You want to know the key to awakening in your soul and in evangelism? It's coming to agree with God that He is right in seeking after the lost. So let's join the recovery effort.

If you're taking notes, I'd say I would just tell you this a quick little quadrant, a little square, divided into four. And this is what we'll end with. Imagine a quadrant in the top right corner. You can write church in the top left corner and church in the top, right. And you drop down to the bottom left and you can write unchurched in the bottom right you can put unknown. What I'd encourage you to think about friends is who are the people in my life that I know that are committed, plugged in and have a vibrant relationship with Jesus and they are in the church. Who are the people as I cross that line over to the left and I see the church, to the people who have left, they are the sheep that have strayed. They are wandering. Who are those people? I drop down to the unchurched, the people who have never been exposed to the gospel, maybe even hostile to the faith, but they don't love Jesus. These might even be those people that you classify as being irredeemable. And then on the bottom right, the people that you say they're in my life, but I have no idea. What I would challenge you to do is this -- to begin thinking about and praying for, by name, the people who fit in those categories and the opportunity to set up a party in heaven?

This dad in Armenia was continuing to dig. Other parents showed up. My son, my daughter, There were 33 students in that one single class with this man's son. Others showed up and they said, It's too late. You're wasting your time. Go home. The fire officials showed up and they said there are fires that have broken out all over the city. You need to go home. It is not safe here. And each time the man responded the same way, he said, Will you help me dig? What else are they going to do? And all he could think every time somebody's got to help me. Are you going to help me now? And he proceeded because he knew and he needed to know, is my boy dead or alive? I made a commitment to go seek him out. 12 hours go by of this digging. 24. 36 hours. Finally, in the 38th hour, the man pulls back a stone and he hears "Dad." And the dad says, "Armand!" Dad, I knew you would come. You did it. I told my friends not to be afraid, because if you were alive, I knew you'd come for me.

Friends. He has done it. And he's come for you.

Will you pray with me?

God, we pray that you would embolden our faith and our witness. That you would strengthen our love and our joy, first for you and then for our neighbor. You have done it. We thank you that Jesus did pay it all and all to him we owe. And so, we give you the totality of our lives now in full surrender. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.