

The Story of Lost Things

Reading: Luke 15.

We are going to take note of just one or two things which lie on the face of this chapter. It has been called "The Story of Lost Things". The three stories go together to make up a whole. They are a threefold answer to an attitude which confronted the Lord continually in His ministry here on the earth, and they go to express for all time the Master's mind and feeling about anything in the nature of that attitude.

The Need of a Recognition of a Lost Condition

The first thing which is very clear in these three parables of lost things is this, that Christ's coming and the salvation which He came to work out, are only of avail, but they are of avail, where a lost condition is recognised and felt. You see the preface or introduction to the parables. "*Both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them.*" There is a stinging rejoinder to that attitude, that spirit, in the little clause at the end of the first parable - "... *more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance*". If a modern writer had written that, he would have put a big question mark in brackets behind that word 'righteous', "... righteous (?) persons, who need no repentance". There is nothing in Me for them. With this threefold emphasis and illustration, He says so clearly, and definitely that the salvation that He has come to bring is only for those who have a consciousness of being lost, or only where there is a recognition of a lost condition. You might question whether the piece of silver had a consciousness of being lost, but undoubtedly the whole chapter is full of the recognition that a lost state existed, and that is what the Lord is getting at, that recognition and realisation that something is lost and it matters. It matters so much that, although it is only one percent in the flock, it is only one tenth in the pieces of silver, yet that one per cent, that tenth, matters more than all else. The recognition of lostness is overwhelming and rules out all other considerations. It takes the foremost place. That is an essential, says this whole story, an essential to Christ's having come from heaven into this world being worthwhile, being of avail, being justified, and so it proved. For the great majority without that recognition of lostness, He came in vain, everything meant nothing. Oh, terrible situation, that "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son*", and all the indescribable and unfathomable meaning of that meant nothing, and means nothing to many. That is very simple, there is nothing profound about this observation that all that the Lord Jesus has come for is here said to depend upon a recognition of a lost condition.

But we put an emphasis also upon this, that, where that lost condition is recognised, that is just what Christ came to meet. The principle of that, of course, can be followed all the way through the life of saved souls as well as into the life of the lost. The Lord means what He is only to those who really consciously need Him. To put that in another way, the Lord by His Spirit continually seeks to bring us to the place where it is a matter of eternal consequence whether we discover that in Him. It is a matter of tremendous significance whether something more of the Lord is now discovered by us. The Lord is never satisfied with theories and doctrines and teachings and truths. The Lord knows quite well that there is nothing in Himself that is of any real value only where that value is recognised as relating to a very deep and terrible need. So He works continually to create a sense of need before ever we can discover what the Lord is. But I have no intention of speaking about that. It is this simple gospel word. If you and I, as being unsaved or saved, have a deep and really living active consciousness of need, the need of Him, that is just what He came for. It is the most hopeful thing: *He is available*. On the other hand, there is this awful rejoinder to such as are of the mentality and spirit of the Pharisees and the scribes — Because you have no such sense of desperate and awful lostness and need, I have nothing for you. Then our hearts say, Lord, ever keep us alive

to our need!

Now we have to challenge our hearts with the first message of the chapter. Do I have a deep and really strong consciousness and sense of needing the Lord? Is there anyone who has that sense in the matter of their salvation? I need the Lord to save me, I cannot go on without Him. Is there anyone who in any other position as His own child feels like that? I need the Lord in a new way, I must know the Lord in some new way. That is the situation which is the most promising, the most hopeful. He has come and all that for which He has come lies in the direction of the consciousness of need. Someone said that consciousness of need is the pathway to heaven. Well, I hope you will not feel that that is too elementary.

Joy in Heaven in the Recovery of the Lost

There is another thing here right on the face of things. It is the upshot of it all. In the issue of the three parables, the supreme gratification in the recovery of the lost thing is seen to be in heaven. The Lord takes the issue of this and carries it right away into heaven, and He says in effect, Yes, although in the story these different people are full of joy and gladness and praise and rejoicing over the recovery, there is something far greater than that, far higher than that. In heaven there is that of which this is only a faint echo. *"I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents"*. That, surely, is a key to a tremendous thing. There is something marvellously significant about that joy in heaven among the angels of God over one sinner that repents. Heaven looks down upon the hundreds of millions crawling about this world and finds supreme joy in one repenting. You see, there is something incomplete about the situation, there is something missing, something without which things cannot be complete. It seems to me that the significance is this — God has lost something. It is not just that people have gone wrong and they are suffering the consequences of their folly; that certain things have happened to them and so certain results follow in their history. No, the history of this whole thing begins and ends in heaven. God is missing something, God has lost something. It was something which belonged to Him, and of course you can see also lying on the face of this very chapter the three Persons of the Trinity. There is the Son, the shepherd going after the flock; there is the Holy Spirit, the light searching; there is the Father. They are all in action in this matter of that which is lost. The history begins in heaven. God knew every one before the world was. That elect company was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and it has been broken into. He has been robbed; that which is His complete inheritance has been broken up. God has lost what belongs to Him; He is the loser, the great loser. When you come back to the end of the whole story and the great final song of redemption is being sung in heaven, what is the language? *"Thou ... hast redeemed us to God"* (Rev. 5:9, KJV). The Lord Jesus is very accurate when He makes people say things; He is perfect as to His theology and doctrine. He makes this man's son, whom we call the Prodigal, say, *"Father"* — not, I have been very wilful and gone my own way and got into an awful mess, but — *"I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight"*. Sin is that which robs God, it is all against God, it is all loss to God. Therefore redemption issues in heaven being filled with rejoicing because God Who is the centre of heaven, the one object of heaven's praise and worship, has got that which is His, God is satisfied. So we say the supreme gratification in redemption even to the smallest part, to the one in the crowd, is in heaven. This is a matter of eternity, a matter of heaven, this recovery of the lost.

There follows with that quite clearly that those who are sympathetic with the Loser share the joy of His recovery. They call together their friends and neighbours saying, Rejoice with me, I have found that which was lost. He has His friends and His neighbours, those who are sympathetic with His interests. Are we those? There is little joy like the joy of being used by the Lord to recover a lost one. I think those who are not really on stretch for bringing back the lost to the Lord have lost themselves one of the supreme joys of life, and it is not just the joy of our gratification at being successful in a quest. It is the

echo of heaven's joy in our hearts. There is nothing like it, it is not natural joy at all. It is a supernatural joy, a heavenly joy. "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*" said they in the days of Nehemiah. If you look at the context of that, you will find that it just meant this, that these people were doing the thing that the Lord wanted done and the Lord was well-pleased and His joy came into their hearts in a day of great difficulty, of many difficulties, and strengthened them. It was His joy, His gratification, that strengthened them in a day of many difficulties. If only there was the echo of the divine heavenly joy in our hearts in this matter, it would help us over many of our personal difficulties. Well again, that is very simple, but it is very true. There are others called into heaven's joy to share it, but just note three other things.

The State of that which is Lost

It is the three states that are here set forth by these three parables. What is the state of the lost sheep? Well, it is distanced from the shepherd and fold. It is a question of afar off. What is the state of the coin, the piece of silver? It is in the dark, the woman had to light the lamp to find it, to dispel the darkness. It was in the dark. What is the condition of the son? The father used the word twice: "*This my son was dead ... this thy brother was dead*". Far off, in the dark, and dead, dead to the owner, dead to its rightful possessor. What, then, is redemption, what is salvation, what is the effect of Christ's work which He came to accomplish? It is to make the far off nigh, to bring home. I think most of us who have come to enjoy, to know, the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, or come to know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, would readily say this that, in that time when we as lost were found, when the Lord found us and laid His hand upon us, we immediately had the sense of being at home, with all that that means. There is a wonderful at-home-ness in the things of the Lord. You remember that little touch in the book of the Acts about those who were released from prison — "*they went to their own company*" (Acts 4:23). It is a sort of spontaneous gravitation in a certain direction that is home. Sometimes just the singing of a hymn will revive that sense that we are at home. We may have been far away from the Lord's people in the world with nothing at all of the Lord and a sense of isolation, and then some day you just hear a well-known hymn sung and you are at home at once in spirit; that is your native breath, your native air. There is something so gratifying about being at home, coming home. The Lord Jesus came to bridge the gap between us and the Father who is our Home, and immediately we respond to Him and He gets us, we have a sense, This is what I have been longing for all the time, I have come home. That is all there is to say about it, it is rest. "*Made nigh*". "*In Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ*". Those that were far off, alienated from God, now made nigh by the Blood of His Cross.

And in darkness, like the coin, engulfed and wrapped in darkness, the light gone out. Do we need to say much about that? It is so true. When we get away from the Lord, the light goes out, the shadows deepen to darkness, all is dark. The work of the Lord Jesus is to dispel the darkness, recover us by destroying the darkness which has engulfed us, and one thing about being saved and coming to the Lord, being found, is this, Now I see! "*Whereas I was blind, now I see*" (John 9:25). Whereas all was dark, now I see, I understand now. It is like that.

But more. "*This my son was dead*", and death is, as I have just said, a matter of being separated from God. That is death in its present form for the lost one, but oh, how terrible death must be for those who are never found, but who eventually discover that they are for ever separated from God and there is no way back. They have refused God's redemption, Christ's salvation, and there is no way back for ever and for ever. That is what is meant by death in its full sense, that is the consciousness of utter helplessness as to salvation. Well, there is no need for us to contemplate that. It lies there as the dark warning. But, blessed be God, for us now death can be changed for life. Separation from God which is death has been overcome by the Lord Jesus. He has swallowed up death in victory. He has destroyed death; that is, He has destroyed that condition of separation

from God which is spiritual death. From death unto life. *"This my son was dead and is alive"*. *"This thy brother was dead and is alive. It is meet to make merry"* (Lk. 15:24, 32).

That is very simple gospel in which most of us rejoice as experience. It is also a test for any others. Is it true? We who were far off have been made nigh, we have come home. *"We who were darkness are now light in the Lord"* (Eph. 5:8). We who were dead are now alive. Well, in the majority of cases here, this is not something too well-known to provoke a smile of joy, a response of praise. But it just may be that someone is not quite sure about it. Well, let us go back to the beginning. What is needed? Just a realisation that you are in that need, and that is what the Lord came for — just for you.