

# The Whole Story: Luke 15:1-7 / Jason Gaston

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Introduction: Welcome to the Summit Church..... My name is Jason Gaston and I am the Family Ministries Pastor. It's a great joy for me to get to stand on the stage this weekend and preach the word.

I'd like to give a special shoutout to our people over at Blue Ridge as they've launched into their first full weekend of Saturday/Sunday services! We're excited to see what God continually does in that part of Raleigh through BRC.

## **When you lose something, you immediately realize the value of that which was lost**

- A TV remote...how did people turn the tv channel prior to remotes?
- A wedding band....
  - Buddy at our Cary Campus who lost his at Defy Gravity. Search party
- A missing child (Story of Holt in Lowes)

## **What was lost was now found 😊**

Today, we'll be in the gospel of Luke, chapter where we'll look at one of 3 parables that Jesus tells in a row about finding something that has been lost.

In Luke 15, Jesus is continuing a conversation with a group of people, and he continues to unveil a little bit about his defining purpose and mission for coming to the earth through the telling of 3 parables.

"Now, the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Now, at this point in the story, things are already getting a little tense. You see, to welcome someone to your table and eat with them is a sign of acceptance.

And that really ticked off the religious leaders. In fact, it's really just building upon what took place a few verses before in Luke 14 when Jesus tells the story of a man who sends out an invitation for a great feast, but all the "well-to-do" who received the invitation were all pre-occupied with bigger and better things. So, the "man" sends out a new order to gather those from the back alleys, from the streets and from the roads...anyone you can find...all the riff raff..and bring them to the feast."

And now, Jesus is actually dining with sinners and tax collectors, and the religious people aren't happy.

"Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then, he calls his friends and neighbors together and says 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

One of the great things about reading parables is that they usually do the explaining of something themselves. They make it pretty easy to understand the point of the story, so I don't feel as if I need to do a ton of unpacking about certain hidden meanings here, it's pretty self explanatory:

We have a sheep that is lost, a shepherd who goes after it, and a party that ensues.

A few things I want us to gather from this parable today:

**1. Our Shepherd pursues us as we wander in the wilderness.**

When you survey the Old Testament, you find some pretty amazing things in regards to the people's understanding of God has a "Shepherd."

- Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.."
- This is the backdrop for every SBC church's stain glass
- Isaiah 40:11 "HE will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he carries them close to his heart
- Ezekiel 34:6 "My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them."
- Ezekiel 34:11-12 "For this is what the Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they scattered..."

**God has always been about the task of pursuing that, which belongs to him. Jesus shows up and says through this parable...I AM THAT SHEPHERD, and YOU ARE THAT SHEEP.**

**One of the primary flaws of the "Religious" was that, just like the early Rabbis, they believed that a sinner had to seek God first- when a sinner repented and conformed to the commands of the Rabbis and Pharisees, then and only then would they be restored into God's favor.**

But aren't we grateful church, Jesus taught that God **pursues** his lost sheep. **God does the pursuing, we do the surrendering.**

The God we see in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is One who loves despite. Despite our sin, our waywardness, our efforts, our failures, despite everything. From the complaining under Moses to the rejection of God as King, from idolatry under the Kings to the compromise under the Romans, God across thousands of years has pursued a stubborn people that we call "The church." When all else fails, He appears in the flesh to knock on their doors, to eat at their tables, to call them back to Him. God will not let them go.<sup>1</sup>

THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL TRUTH, and we actually see it here in this parable. Look at end of verse 4:

**"he searches until he finds it."**

- Maybe you're here today and you're the sheep that's lost in the pain of a marriage gone bad. He pursues you
- Maybe you're locked up behind bars, and wondering if a loving God could ever forgive the wrong you've done. HE'S PURSUING YOU

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/fuller/2015/02/the-god-who-pursues-us-relentlessly/>

- Maybe you've lost it all in your business because of bad ethics and business practices...HE'S PURSUING YOU

**He's pursuing you, and he will not stop until he FINDS YOU!**

**2. A little celebration would do us some good.**

Now, in case you haven't figured out, I'm a pretty loud guy, and I get HYPE pretty easy. I actually coach baseball in a league here in the Raleigh area and I have parents tell me that they can hear me cheering on the field from the parking lot...and they think that someone just hit a homerun...and really all it was was a kid actually ran to the right base and I went bananas.

What fires you up? What do you get excited about?

I recently heard from our College team that 20 college students have professed faith in Christ since move-in...that's 20 students in a month people. C'MON SOMEBODY!!!

Our Family Ministry (kids/students) has seen 100+ people baptized (already this year. Which by the way, we'll be doing baptisms for a few weeks in a row, so if you're interested, get on board baby!)

Each one of those numbers represents a person. Every one of those people have a story, and their story started out as the lost sheep and a pursuing shepherd that restored them!

- Do we have people in our lives that we care about coming to faith?
  - We ask this question a lot, but “WHO IS YOUR ONE?” Who is the one that we are going after to see returned to the community and relationship they were created for.
  - We saw “the one” simply because we don’t think that great movements of God always start with the masses, more often than not they start with ONE. And if you want to see a great move of God in our city and around the world, it most likely is starting with the ONE in the cul-de-sac, or the classroom, or the sports team, or the community organization....

**Now, I think many of us don’t get excited about the lost coming to faith for various reasons, but one of those reasons primarily is that We’ve either simply forgotten the work of God in our lives or we don’t believe that what he’s done in the past he can do in the future.**

*Now, I’m about to go on a little bit of a tangent, so let me just preface that. One of the things that absolutely baffles me about the church is that we can show up on a weekend, and be NON-RESPONSIVE to the great love of that we have in Christ. We sit in our pews, or our chairs (depending on what campus you’re currently sitting at), and we WATCH. We SPECTATE. We disengage.*

Luke 15:5-6) And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says “Rejoice **with me**; I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous person who do not need to repent.”

**Can you just catch something here with me:**

Notice the chain reaction, the domino effect of joy:  
 Joy starts in the heart of the SHEPHERD  
 Joy trickles down to the church

What I love is that Jesus just slapped the stiff necked religious leaders in the face with this statement. He says “I REJOICE IN ANYONE that returns home.” ANYONE! (We’ll get to this in the next point)

If that’s the case with our heavenly father, our good shepherd, the one who went on a rescue mission to redeem us when we were at our very worst, than how could we live our lives in any other way than in great rejoicing??!???

Nothing else on the face of the planet should thrill our soul more than the reality of the gospel...he sought us in our wilderness and redeemed us, made us alive!! You here that, ALIVE!! Most of us live our lives as if we’re already dead...

Augustine once said “Oh that thou would enter into my heart (*I Know I know, we’re not supposed to ask Jesus into our heart*), inebriate it, that I may forget my ills, and embrace thee, my sole good!

Listen, worship, rejoicing, **it doesn’t start with us. It starts with God.** God initiates it...we simply respond!!!

Let’s practice this for a second....don’t be afraid...you can even “interact” if you’d like. C’mon somebody...we about to have church up in here.

- **John 1:12:** Although I may have been orphaned, God has now called me HIS CHILD!
- **John 15:15:** Once an enemy of the cross, Jesus now calls me FRIEND!
- **Romans 5:1** Once at war and at odd with God, I now have peace and justification through CHRIST
- **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** You were so loved and cherished that you were PURCHASED with a PRICE. Literally, the good shepherd would one day lay down at the gate and take the bite from the enemy, to bring about the salvation of his sheep.
- **1 Corinthians 12:27:** Although you were once alone in the wilderness, in Christ you now BELONG to the body
- **Hebrews 4:14-16:** Alienation from God was your anthem, but now you have direct access to the throne of Grace through Christ!!!!

- **Romans 8:1-2:** Condemnation is no longer upon you, but FREEDOM is your song
- **Romans 8:28:** Did you know that God is working ALL THINGS together for your good? ALL THINGS! ALL THINGS!!!!
- **Philippians 1:6** God has started a work in you, and guess what...he ain’t finished yet!!!! No matter what your circumstance coming into the worship gathering this week, HE AINT FINISHED YET!!!!!!!!!!!!
- **Philippians 3:20:** Your citizenship used to be an alien in the far country...but now...oh now....your soul has found new citizenship in heaven!!
- **2 Timothy 1:7:** Fear is not your m-o, but you now have a spirit of love, sound mind, and POWER!!
- **Ephesians 2:10** YOU ARE GOD’S WORKMANSHIP!!!!!!

You hear those truths...NOW WHAT?

**YOU WORSHIP. YOU CELEBRATE.**

- Lift your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord! – **Psalm 134:2**
- Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! – **Psalm 32:11**
- Clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout for God with a voice of triumph! – **Psalm 47:1**
- And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever towards Israel.” And all the people

shouted with a great shout when they praise the Lord!  
– Ezra 3:11

I'm not saying get crazy up in here, we don't need any runners up and down the aisles with banners and zumba dancing. Scripture gives us 1 Cor. 14 that we are to have order in our services... but I am saying...in the name of all that's holy and sacred...DO SOMETHING!

What once was lost...has now been found.

### **3. We are better together.**

**Now, if I were to ask you about what you perceive the significance of the sheep from this parable to be, we could probably get a few different responses. But what you find out might surprise you.....**

- It wasn't that he/she was VP of the sheep club / QB 1 for Durham Lamb Chops /
- **The significance of the lost sheep? IT WAS LOST**

**To be lost from something means you've gone away from where you were supposed to be.**

- **Maybe the sheep in this story was just a middle school sheep.** His buddies dared him to do something stupid, so he did it
- **Maybe the sheep got some bad marriage advice from Sheep #73 in the pen, and he left and went out on his own.**

**The reality is that the SHEEP WAS LOST, and ALONE. He was in isolation, and it needed to be brought back. Back to where?**

**To the relationship with its SHEPHERD and to the other SHEEP.**

**Remember the context here as this sets the statement up for a serious showdown:**

**Jesus is talking with two groups of people:**

- **The stuck up religious right (Intended audience)**
- **The tax collectors and sinners**

the tax collectors and sinners had no value in the kingdom of God in the eyes of the religious. They had no business at the table, and the fact that Jesus associated with them himself, in their eyes, was an indictment on his sinfulness.

Why did the religious leaders think that? Well, it was because they did not follow the ways of God like they did. They did not obey all the rituals, laws, and ceremonies like they did. They lived heathen lives, stealing, robbing...lives of free sexuality and etc..

History tells us that Tax Collectors were one of the most hated groups of people on the planet!

they were hardened criminals in the eyes of the Jews.

“In Jewish culture they were formally cursed because they were turncoat Jews who had sold their souls to buy Roman tax-gathering franchises so they could prey on their fellow Jews. They were loathed in every way. Synagogues would not accept their offerings. Their testimony was not received in Jewish courts. **They were held to be worse than the heathen.**”<sup>2</sup>

They basically took, as far as we can tell, around 90% of the household income to send to Rome to help fund the armies of the mighty empire. **90% Y’all think you get angry during tax season right..... These people were crooks.** They were the ancient world’s version of Bernie Madoff

Then...on top of that, you’ve got the “Sinners.” Now, this is huge, because it’s not just the “oh...we’re all sinners...bless our hearts” type of people. This was a specific class of sinner. Think: Slave traders and strippers. What we also know is that these were not only immoral people in their business, but they were despised socially. People who were born with deformities, mangled faces, eyeballs gone, arms ripped off, etc...

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 130-131.

### **These two crowds could not be more different:**

- One wears the button up dress shirt, khaki pants, tithes their 10%, involved in a small group, nice hair, nice car and they wore Sauvage cologne, and they KNEW IT.
- The other group? HA! I imagine the stench around the table with Jesus was unlike anything the others could comprehend.

Question: When you think about the church, which group do you have in your more in your mind?

Jesus is not after a people that fit our depiction of what the church should be. It’s FAR GREATER than what we can imagine. Jesus is passionately seeking YOU, and he is seeking after those in our communities that are orphaned, at risk kids, unwed mothers, widows, strippers, alcoholics, drug users, adulterers, work-a-holics, thieves, good moral family across the street....HIS KINGDOM KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES AND LIMITATIONS.

CALL PEOPLE ON THE STAGE // outward facing community not an inwards facing community.<sup>3</sup>

Redeemed for Christ’s Glory, For his Mission.

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<sup>3</sup> Illustration borrowed from Brad Cooper @ Newspring Church in his sermon “You Can’t Do Life Alone” on 8/21/16

