

# The lost property box

The other day, I came across Luke chapter 15, for the first time in a while. It struck me that it's a bit like the gospel's "lost property box". In it, the Lord Jesus gives three parables, all about things that are lost: a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost person (in fact a lost son, sometimes referred to as the prodigal son). I've been pondering the chapter a little. The first couple of verses set the scene - [Luke 15:1-2](#):

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'

This gives a concise introduction and the reason for the focus on the lost. The Lord Jesus was taking the time to talk to some tax collectors and sinners. These people would likely have been outcast - looked down on with disdain by the other Israelite people. The Lord's actions made for the displeasure of some Pharisees and teachers of the law. These were the authorities of the day: they were often quite elitist and zealous for the Old Testament laws, in which they considered themselves to be highly educated and skilled. They might have taken an attitude of superiority even toward decent law-abiding Hebrews, much more so to these spiritual reprobates. Aware that they were grumbling, Jesus set about telling them some parables to shed his light on the situation.

The first of the three parables, often known as the parable of the lost sheep, is here in [Luke 15:3-7](#):

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." <sup>7</sup> 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 people who do not need to repent.'

This parable is short and sweet, but it packs a punch. It refers to the good shepherd, so when one of his sheep meandered away, He didn't go and pinch someone else's sheep whilst no one was looking! Neither did he buy another sheep to replace it, maybe so that his father won't notice that one had got lost. It isn't really about numbers and he wasn't out to find a better one. It was about that one particular individual. The shepherd knew it by name and the sheep knew its shepherd's voice. The shepherd wanted his own sheep back and when he found it, he celebrated! I think that speaks a lot about the value the Lord puts on each of his people - you, me, him and her. No one is excluded from the potential to be in Jesus' flock - not even the tax collectors and sinners: those that the authorities may have considered irretrievably lost.

Verse 7 is quite poignant. Jesus told another parable, that talked about the pharisees' attitudes. It's in the same gospel, this time in [Luke 18:9-14](#). Here it is:

<sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

<sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

<sup>14</sup> "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

In Luke 15:7, above, was the Lord Jesus implying that the pharisees and teachers of the law didn't need to repent, or that they were too lost in their own importance to acknowledge the need for repentance? I imagine it might be the latter.

Returning to Luke 15 the Lord went on to give another parable, in [Luke 15:8-10](#):

<sup>8</sup> 'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Well, if you want to find a lost coin in a dark corner, you could do worse than shine a light and see if it sparkles! Once she'd found her coin, the woman took it out of the darkness and into the light, a little like [1 Peter 2:9-10](#):

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I wonder if Peter was remembering some of the Lord's sayings about light and darkness when he penned that snippet. It's a common metaphor in the bible.

Once again, back to Luke 15 and the Lord Jesus gave his third and last parable, on that particular subject, in [Luke 15:11-32](#):

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup> 'Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> 'When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants."<sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.

'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> 'The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

<sup>22</sup> 'But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> 'Meanwhile, the elder son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound."

<sup>28</sup> 'The elder brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

<sup>31</sup> "'My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

For me, personally, this parable so amazingly demonstrates the redeeming, saving nature of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin didn't move the pharisees and teachers of the law, surely this one would. Well...

The prodigal son realised that he had to change his attitudes as he contemplated eating the pigs' food. What an awful lesson to have to learn. I think that, sometimes to our own sufferance, we're only ready for the Lord's way once human resources are exhausted. Sometimes, the way out of the mess is not an easy one. It was at the bottom of the lost son's pit that he prepared his speech of repentance. When he came over the skyline, his father set off to run and meet him. The lad got only the first line of his statement out before the father slammed into him and he disappeared into his father's arms. Enveloped in the folds of his father's cloak, for a time I think that lad was barely visible, probably washed by his dad's tears of relief and joy. And then, what a celebration!

It takes sense and courage to jettison our own misconceptions and mess ups, to go home and learn Dad's business Dad's way. For me at least, it was a bit like the lid coming off the lost property box and the light streaming in, as if the Lord said, "Yes, that one's mine. I've paid the price. I'll take him now." His way didn't always seem to make sense. Was I really in that much of a mess? How could Jesus' death on the cross save me? So many questions. Eventually, I realised that, but for Jesus, I was as lost as that sheep, that coin, that lost lad. It was time to come home and I've been learning ever since.

God bless!

Steve W.