

Meet Jesus and Be Found

Luke 15:1-2,11-32

Have you ever lost anything valuable?
I lost my wedding ring a couple of years into married life
And then six months later I was unfolding a spare mattress
And I found it again
I was so relieved that I made a decision that day to put on 20 kilos
So that this ring can never leave my finger again
That's how much I love my wife Emma

Imagine losing a person
Millie Kwast was four years old
When she wandered away barefoot from her home at Glenrock Station
in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales
Realising that Millie was lost as the sun was setting
Her parents raised the alarm
And a massive search was launched to search for her through the night
Kerry Packer, one of Australia's richest men
And an owner of a neighbouring property
Sent two of his helicopters and a hundred workers to find the lost girl
Millie was missing for almost 24 hours
When she was found the next morning by a farmer 8 kms from her home
Australian musician Colin Buchanan wrote a song about Millie
And got to meet the grown-up Millie a few years ago
Her mum Andrea also wrote a book about the incident called "Millie and her angels"
Can you imagine how her parents would have felt?
When they were reunited with their lost daughter
Imagine the relief, the tears of joy when they embraced her, once lost, not found
Keep that in mind as we look at today's bible passage.

Let's have a look at the context of our meal with Jesus

Verse 1

All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Jesus ate with a Pharisee last week
The Pharisees this week are criticizing Jesus for who he is eating with
Jesus is eating with outcasts,
Those who would have been considered unworthy and unwelcome
Condemned for their publicly known sin
Tax collectors in particular were known as being greedy traitors who worked for the Romans
Taking more than was necessary from their fellow Jews
The issue the Pharisees had, was that if Jesus really was from God
Then he wouldn't associate with such sinful people
So they're really making a statement about how God feels about sinful people
God doesn't welcome them and Jesus should know better

Jesus then tells three stories about things that are lost and then found
A lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son.
And in each story
He is making the same point – God delights in finding lost things
Let's look at the story of the lost son more closely under four headings

The Lost Rebel
The Loving Father
The Lost Rule Keeper
And The Seeking Son

Firstly The Lost Rebel

Verse 11

¹¹ He also said, "A man had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them.

In an honour/shame culture when you ask for your inheritance
It's like saying "Dad, you're dead to me"
In a culture built around honouring parents this was a shameful insult

According to the law, the older son gets two thirds of the land when Dad dies
And the younger son one third.
It's just that the younger son wants the money now
So the father would have had to sell a third of the land
And this would have been visible to the community
And therefore quite shameful for their family's reputation

What's shocking in this story is that the father agrees
He slices up the property one third and two thirds
And verse 12 says he distributed the assets to them
That is he gives each share to his sons now before he dies.
In Chinese culture, a parent is more likely to kill you for making a request like this son
As my mum used to say to me "I brought you into this world"
"I can take you out of it"
Half-joking, half-serious, I love you mum
At the very least this father should have rejected this son's request.
Not given him what he wants

Little Millie Kwast got lost by accident
This child *wants* to be lost
He is the lost rebel
He moves to a distant country
As if wanting to go as far as he can from his family
And he makes a mess of it
He squanders his share of the estate on foolish living verse 13
On prostitutes verse 30
All the money's gone
And now he's working with pigs
Another shameful thing for a Jewish person
Now he's so hungry, he's jealous of the pigs

His father once gave him everything he asked for
now no one will even give him pig food
This is rock bottom.
And there's only one way to go when you hit rock bottom.

Verse 17

¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹ I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers."

It's a risky plan isn't it?
Go back to Dad
Even though I treated Dad like dirt
But Dad might well say to me
"You're dead to me too"
"Don't come crawling back here looking for favours"
But what other option does he have?
He's desperate.
A servant of his Father is better than starving to death.
And so he rehearses his speech as he makes the long walk home
"Father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight"

I wonder if you've ever feel like this rebel?

A lost cause?

You've made bad choices and you're full of regrets
You've burned bridges with people you love
You've lost time and money
Maybe even your health
You desperately wish you could turn back time
You feel beyond help and beyond hope
You feel like a lost cause with people and with God
This story is in the Bible
Because we worship a God of lost causes
The tax collectors eating with Jesus
Are like the younger son in this story
They are not innocent
They carry their share of guilt and shame for bad choices
But the fact that Jesus is eating with them
Shows you that God offers hope to the hopeless
If you're prepared to pray something like what this son prayed
"Father I have sinned against heaven"
With God even if everyone else rejects you there is still hope for a lost cause

Secondly The Loving Father

Verse 20

²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him.

This is the most confronting picture of this story
If the younger son represents the tax collectors
The loving father in this story represents God
It's a scandalous scene in that culture
To think that a Middle Eastern father
Would lower his dignity by running to his rebellious son
Especially after being humiliated by his son is unthinkable
A dignified father
Would have the pride to demand that the son come to him
But this father *runs* to embrace his lost son
and showers him with kisses.
The Pharisees would have been in cardiac arrest
At the shock of Jesus talking about God like this loving father.

The son tries to get out the speech he rehearsed
Quite prepared to live out his days as a servant
That's even more than he deserves
But the father will have none of it
He brings him back as a son

Verse 23

Let's celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.

Can you imagine the joy, the relief when Millie's parents were reunited with little Millie
Worried all night that anything could have happened to her
And perhaps the worst thought – that she was dead and all alone
Imagine the utter relief and joy that she was alive and home
That is the joy of God when lost rebels come home
In fact the consistent theme of the three stories of the lost coin, lost sheep and lost son
Is this: God has enormous joy when he finds lost people
It is no small thing for God
He celebrates and he wants others to celebrate
His heart longs for lost people to come home
And he welcomes them
He embraces them
He clothes them
He feasts with them
Because he is the loving father

Let me just pause to say something about God as Father
There are a number of us here
Who's view of God as a loving Father
Might be quite affected by our own experience of our fathers
When father's day is a difficult day
The term father might trigger all sorts of emotions
I myself have had a complicated relationship with my father over the years
But instead of viewing God as father through the lens of your own father
Can I encourage you to do something that has helped me
Try the other way around?
Let the definition of father be shaped by Jesus

Jesus once said, "if you've seen me, you've seen the Father"
That's been a helpful thing for me
To start with God as father revealed by Jesus
And then to see my own relationship with my Dad
And my own relationship as a father to my kids
Through the lens of God as my loving father.

So let me ask you

Will you come home?

God the Loving Father is waiting for you
Lost rebels are welcome home

How good was Jole's homecoming story?
She met Jesus at 13
Then she ran from God through the New Age
She embraced that life
She visited hundreds of psychics
She read tarot cards for people
Her life was filled with anger and broken relationships
And then after more than 20 years of running
What did Jole say?
"Tears started streaming down my face"
"And it was like God had called me back"
"Like the prodigal son I returned home"
Jole came home to her loving father

John Newton the author of the most famous Christian song Amazing Grace
Wrote this song about his own experience as a lost rebel
Once a rough as guts captain of slave trading ships
Saved by God
Then ordained as an Anglican minister
And then Newton became a leading voice in the abolition of slavery in England
Listen to how he described himself in that first verse
*Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch
I once was lost
But now am found
Was blind but now I see*
John Newton the lost rebel came home to his loving father.

We don't all run from God in the same way
Some run through sex
Some run through alcohol and drugs
Some run through ambition and money
Some run through relationships
Some run through pleasure
Underneath it is the same attitude as the younger son
"God, I want what you can give me"
"I just don't want you"
The Bible calls this sin
The astounding thing about God is that He still welcomes sinners home

So will you come home?
You might be thinking “he won’t welcome me”
“I smell like the pigs”
No this loving father will embrace you if you come home

Just when you thought that was the end of the story
There’s another lost son

Our third point – The Lost Rule Keeper

Jesus adds in a final twist
There are not one but two lost sons
This time not a rebel but a rule keeper

This son never left home unlike his brother
But he’s still incredibly lost
He hears that the father has slaughtered their finest calf
And is celebrating with a feast at the return of his deadbeat brother
And his blood is boiling with resentment

Verse 28

²⁸ “Then he became angry and didn’t want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’

How does this son describe himself?
“slaving” many years for his father, never “disobeying” orders
This son followed every rule and that’s the problem
He looks at himself as a slave, not a son
“Yet you never gave me a goat” is his complaint
Remember everything the father owns
The remaining two thirds of the estate, had already been given to this son
And yet he’s complaining about receiving a goat
This son follows the rules
But just like his brother
He has no heart for his Father
And just like his brother
He wants things from His father but he doesn’t want His father
But the heart of the Father is to rejoice with both his sons
The father pleads for the older son to join the celebration
And the ruler keeper just has resentment in his heart
He is so lost, even though he never left home

And you know who Jesus is aiming this part of the story at?
The Pharisees
So good at religious rule keeping
“I’m a good person”
“I’ve lived a decent life – God will accept me”
“I’m not like those people”
There is no love in their hearts for others

They don't share any of God's joy when sinners turn back to God
You see at least the tax collectors know they're lost
But the Pharisees in their self-righteousness
Have no idea just how lost they truly are
Jesus finishes the story abruptly with a challenge to the Pharisees and to us.

Are you too good for God?

If you've grown up in a religious family
If you have a respectable job
If you live in a nice area
If you follow a code of high ethics and morals
Then you run the risk of being too good for God
Here's the thing right
You might have been going to church for years
And still be completely lost
You might have never done something especially rebellious
But it doesn't mean that you're not a sinner
Because the danger for you is that you think that you're better
That you don't need Jesus
Because you're too good for God

The apostle Paul who wrote most of the New Testament
Was once too good for God
He once described himself as a Pharisee of Pharisees
Who pursued law keeping with zeal
He persecuted Christians and imprisoned them
He approved of their deaths all in the name of God
No love for sinners just rule keeping
No joy when sinners met Jesus and turned back to God
That is until the day he met Jesus and was humbled by God
Then he described himself as the chief of sinners
All of his rule keeping
All of His pride and superiority
Was laid aside when Jesus found him
In fact in Jesus finding him, Paul lost everything else
And he was glad about it – because now he had real joy in Jesus
What about you?
Are you willing to give up the rule keeping for a relationship with Jesus?

This brings us to our last point

The Seeking Son

We've met two lost sons
But the true son in the story is Jesus – the Son of God
And he shows us even more of God
We might be tempted to think that God is just the loving Father
Who waits for us to come home so he can embrace us
But he is much more than that
He's the loving Father who sends his son to look for us

Later in Luke's gospel in chapter 19

Jesus said of himself
“For the Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost”
Jesus *pursues* lost sinners
He pursues both lost rebels and lost rule keepers
God doesn’t wait for us to come home
He’s on a mission to find us
Jole described Jesus as 100% God and 100% man
God came down from heaven
God became a man like one of us
To live a perfectly sinless and obedient life to the point of death on the cross for us
So that our sins can be forgiven
This is truth and this is grace
We’ve all sinned against God
Whether by rebellion or rule keeping
And sinners deserve death according to the bible
We can’t escape that truth
But Jesus is full of grace
He is willing to take our place
And die our death for our sin
This is how far the love of Jesus will go to find us
He not only eats with tax collectors and Pharisees
He is willing to give up his life for them
And he is willing to give his life up for us
Forgiveness from the Father is possible
Because the Father’s only son paid the price of that forgiveness
And even if we run from God
Jesus will pursue us
And once he finds us he is also committed to making us new people
Not leaving us the way we are but changing us to be like him.

The English author Francis Thompson
Wrote a poem called the Hound of Heaven
To describe the relentless pursuit of God to bring us home
Often we are determined to run from God
Thinking that it will give us the freedom we long for

He starts his poem
*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind;
and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;*

The runner flees God
Seeking fulfillment in everything else except God
Yet every attempt fails
And the hound pursues him relentlessly

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

*But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,*

The runner admits why he is running
even though he knows the Hound pursuing him loves him

*For, though I knew His love Who followed,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.*

The runner admits the honest truth
He is running from God because having God's love
Means giving up the other things he loves in place of God

Until exhausted the runner gives up
And the hound reaches out his loving hand to him and says
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest, I am He Whom thou seekest!

What if the things you so desperately run after
Can only be found in Jesus?
And what if he has been the one all this time, chasing after you?

Francis Thompson wrote this poem about himself
He started life as a rule keeper
He first trained for the priesthood but failed
His father wanted him to be a doctor like himself
And after 8 years of study he failed at that
Then Thompson decided to rebel
He left for London to become a writer
And he spent three years living on the streets of London
Homeless and penniless
He became addicted to opium
After ill health and a nervous breakdown
Wilfried and Alice Meynell came across his poems and recognized his talent
And then effectively, the Meynell's saved Thompson's life
They took him into their family
They funded his stays in a monastery to recover from his addiction
They cared for him during relapses
And it was under their care that Thompson wrote "The Hound of Heaven"

Well what about you?

Will you let Jesus find you?

It's time to stop running

Let The Hound of Heaven find you

For Jesus came to seek and save the lost

The one chasing after you loves you

He gave his life for you and you need not be terrified of him.

When they found little Millie just after dawn

She was curled up asleep with her dog Dasher
And when they asked her "where were you Millie?"
Millie said, I was lying next to Dasher, I was never lost
Meet Jesus and be found

If you feel ready to be found by Jesus it's as simple as saying, sorry, thank you, please

*Dear God,
I'm sorry for being lost in my sin
Thank you for sending Jesus to find me.
Please help me to come home and live with you and with Jesus.
Amen*

And if you pray a prayer like that
This is the start of a new life with Jesus
We would love to help you continue in this new life
Speak to the person who brought you

If you're still trying to figure out who Jesus is
And whether his death and resurrection are real
Why not come to Christianity Explored with your friend or family member
Come see if Jesus is worthy of your trust.

I'm going to pray to finish
If this is your prayer today to God
Pray the prayer on the screen with me quietly after each line.