

Good Morning Beloved, and welcome to the worship service at the fair. It is my honor to be here in worship with you, God willing this will be a longstanding tradition where we can gather together like this. This morning's message is one that strikes at the very heart of who we are in the world. We are looking at three of Jesus's parables, all of which deal with that which is lost. To be frank, these parables are spoken by Jesus to show that we are never too lost or too far gone. Salvation is always there for the man or woman who desires it.

The first of the three parables we looked at is appropriate for us to hear while we are out at the fair. With the animals next door in the 4H building we can get a pretty good reminder about sheep. When Jesus begins this parable, He is talking to a group of Pharisees (religious leaders) who are judging Him for spending time ministering sinners and tax collectors. In response, Jesus gives them this parable about the lost sheep. The first thing He says to those who were questioning His ministering to the dregs of society is an odd question: "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?" In Jesus's day, a hundred sheep was a large flock to own, but an individual sheep would still have been some loss. The answer to Jesus's rhetorical question here, actually likely would have been "none of us." Nobody in human life would be willing to risk his life for the one, leaving his livelihood so exposed. Yet that is precisely the point of the parable... the Lord cares for the little lost one. "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." When the lost sheep is found, the owner rejoices greatly. The summary of the parable is in verse seven: "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." The message to the Pharisees was clear... God cares for the lost, and desires that they not remain lost. This parable isn't about sheep, it is about us Beloved, it is about those of us who are caught in sin and shame and death and how the Lord still desires that we come home to Him.

The second parable we looked at is the lady with the coins. It is very similar to the first, in that the coin which is lost is of great importance, even though it is part of a multitude. These coins in particular that are mentioned would not have been particularly valuable (although it most certainly depends upon how poor the woman was), but they do represent savings. The major point in this parable is exactly the same as the first, that the Lord cares for that which is lost. It isn't about lost revenue (as animals or money), it is about souls. In the same way that the woman rejoices with her friends over her found coin, we read "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." The Lord earnestly desires those who are lost, those who have fallen away, those who are living their short lives without Him... He desires that they come home. Both of these first two parables set the stage for the final one we read.

This brings us to perhaps the most well known of all the parables Jesus teaches in the Gospels: that of the Prodigal Son. The parable of the Prodigal Son cuts right to the core of why Jesus came, lived, died, and rose again. Beloved, this is the heart of the message this morning, and even if you have heard this a thousand times it is good to be reminded that the Lord desires to save those who are lost. The setting for this parable is a man's household, in which he has two sons. The younger one comes to the father and demands that he receive his inheritance. "Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me." As is the case today, an inheritance was usually given when one was dead. Imagine the look on your father's face if you asked for your half of the inheritance... basically, "Dad, I wish you were dead, give me your stuff." Worse, we read what this

son did with the inheritance that his father so generously gave him. “And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.” Not only does his son demand his half of the inheritance, basically implying that he wishes his dad was dead, but he also wastes everything that has been given to him. These possessions aren’t earned, they are given. This lifestyle of loose living and wanton debauchery is one of the great fears of any parent isn’t it? (There are many proverbs and parts of Ecclesiastes that warn about just such things.) No parent hopes that their child is reckless and destructive, and it is great grief when our children act so. It is at the moment when the younger son runs out of money, after he has spent everything his father has given him on prostitutes and drink, that he then is caught up in a severe famine.

“Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into the field to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.” To a proper Jew being associated with swine was an awful thing that was against their purity laws. Furthermore, being a hireling to a foreigner was also a shameful thing. But the younger son, the prodigal son, has no choice. He is starving, and even though he works in this completely horrific manner, he continues to go hungry. Beloved, much like the lost sheep in the first parable that is in danger by itself away from the shepherd, or much like the lost coin that is in danger of being forever lost, the younger son is lost and is in danger of being lost for good. It is at this moment that he has the realization that back home even his father’s servants are well taken care of. “But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’” It is an honest assessment of his situation isn’t it? The father owes him nothing. There is nothing he has to offer his father, other than being a lowly hired servant, but he knows that this is his only shot at living. Beloved, the younger son in this parable is one who has wandered away from the Lord, and the father is a stand in for our Heavenly Father. This parable, although well known and ancient, tells us the truth even today.

How many of us have found ourselves in the position of the younger son? We have strayed away, we have chosen to live in defiance of our Heavenly Father, and in the blink of an eye we realize just how lost we really are. There is nothing in this life that satisfies outside of a solid relationship with the Lord. All of the fun living by itself does not bring joy... that comes only from being “home” if you will. For many of you, perhaps you have strayed away after being close to the Father. You have chosen to act in ways that you know are wrong, to live a lifestyle that you know is not in accordance with the Lord, and you may even be wondering something similar to what the younger son in this parable wonders. “Maybe he will let me in the back door? Maybe I can be a servant? Maybe he will, out of pity, give me something?” Beloved, notice how this parable ends, and recognize that the Lord desires nothing more than for you to come home.

“So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” Forgiveness, Beloved, is the name of the game here. The younger son, who rightfully could have been considered dead to the father by his own actions, is immediately rejoiced over for coming home. There is no belittling, no just punishment, no pity...

rather rejoicing and forgiveness for the son's return. The father's response to his older son's questioning on this is such: "But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." Beloved, there is no greater joy than the return of that which has been lost... a man or woman who comes home to the Lord.

The truth is that there are probably more than a few of you this morning who feel lost. You may identify with that lost sheep, that lost coin, or the prodigal son. You have wandered away, you are without hope on your own, you are lost. Beloved, the message for you this morning is that the Lord simply wants you to come home to Him. Some of you may have that relationship with Jesus, you may be secure, but your faith is feeling listless. You haven't been in your Bible or in church in a while, your faith feels like it is on life support. For you the message is also the same. Just come home, abide in Christ and find your rest in Him. Return to the One who made you, who cared enough to pay for your sins with His own blood, who desires your soul to spend eternity with Him. This isn't about becoming perfect, about having it all together, about making retribution. Jesus did all that for you, paved the way, so that you could come home to the Lord.

For the people of Jesus's day who were listening to this, the message was clear that the sinners and tax collectors were also loved by the Lord. The religious leaders, who should have been the ones looking for the lost, were being reminded that the Lord cares for the lost and the aimless ones, that He desires them to enter the kingdom if they turn to Him. For us today the message is the same. If we are secure in our faith, then we should also be looking for the lost ones to lead them home to the Lord. If we are not secure in our faith, if we are the lost ones, then we are to remember that Jesus is calling us home to Him. Beloved, let us pray.