

Breaking News in Heaven

Luke 15:8-10

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We all know the feeling of being lost. Maybe you used a GPS or map to find your way again, or maybe a helpful friend or stranger helped you find your way. There's no better feeling than knowing you have been found and are on the right course again. Jesus uses a parable to communicate to His disciples that He is in the business of finding lost people—lost souls—and setting them on the right course. And Jesus also indicates that some very special, though unseen, witnesses are rejoicing whenever a lost soul is found through faith in Jesus.

There is something in the average man's mind that finds it nearly impossible to admit when he's lost. We fellas don't get lost, do we? We just temporarily lose our bearings.

GPS has been a big help—it's saved many a marriage—but it's not always perfect. My wife and I were traveling some time ago when GPS took us down some back roads then onto a gravel road that led to a dead-end.

But even without GPS, I've been able to get us lost all by myself. And my wife will drop subtle hints like, "Honey, we're lost." That's subtle. And the last thing I want to say is, "You're right, I am completely lost." So I'll say, "I know where we are." I do; we are somewhere in North America. And my wife is sitting over there quietly, and I know what she's thinking: she's thinking how much she loves me and admires my determination.

The truth is every human heart has trouble admitting it is hopelessly lost.

In a more serious manner of speaking, the world today is filled with lost, wandering people. And it isn't just a gravel road and a dead-end; it's the possibility of a wasted life and an eternal future without joy.

Salvation follows the admission of being lost—the transparent admission of sin and the need for the Divine Shepherd.

But even when you become a Christian, you can stray, you can disobey your Shepherd.

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love,” as Robert Robinson wrote it in 1758.

Martin Luther the reformer taught 500 years ago that the Christian life is a life that begins with repentance and continually includes repentance, because we have wandering, disobedient hearts.

There’s not a day gone by where we’ve made it easy for the Lord to be our Shepherd.

We get a good illustration of what that looks like with children.

Children often act toward their parents like we act toward our heavenly Father, even though we happen to have a perfect Father—the perfect parent.

I was given a book that catalogs stories of things children did and said; I found the stories fascinating, humorous, and convicting.

Sharon wrote from Pennsylvania about her four-year old daughter. It was bedtime, she writes, and my four-year-old, Emily, complained that she was not ready to go to bed. I explained that as her mother, it was up to me to determine the time to go to sleep; I explained that God gave me the job of taking care of all the details in her life; making sure she ate right, and got enough sleep at night. “Now, I’m not trying to be a mean mother,” Sharon said, “but this is the job God gave me.” To which Emily declared, “Then you’re fired.”

If you think you have trouble with your children, just remember the first humans, who were children of God created by God.

A family from church sent me this illustration: after creating the universe—this beautiful planet, the natural world, and the animal kingdom—on the final day of creation, God created Adam and Eve.

One of the first things God said to His children included the word, “Don’t.”

“Don’t what?” Adam replied.

“Don’t eat the fruit from that tree over there; it is forbidden fruit,” God said.

“Forbidden fruit? Hey Eve, we’ve got some forbidden fruit over here.”

“No way!”

“Yes way!”

“Don’t eat that fruit,” God said;

“Why not? Why can’t we?” Eve asked.

God said, “Because I said so, that’s why” wondering why He hadn’t stopped creating after making the giraffes.

It wasn’t long before God saw the children eating that forbidden fruit.

“Didn’t I tell you not to eat that fruit?” God demanded.

“I think so,” Adam replied.

“Then why did you eat it?”

“Well,” Adam said, pointing at Eve, “she gave it to me; it’s all her fault.”

“It is not!” Eve shouted;

“Yes, it is.”

“Is not.”

“Is so.”

“Is not.”

“Is so!”

Having had it with the two of them, God punished them, and God’s punishment was that Adam and Eve would have children of their own!

The reason that’s humorous is because it’s universal.

We need a Shepherd—a Shepherd to find you as an unbeliever and a Shepherd to guide you as a believer all the way home.

Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people, including religious leaders in **Luke chapter 15**, and all these people have one thing in common: they’re lost; they need to be found.

The theme of these parables in this entire chapter is the same; simply put, “lost and found.”

Jesus delivers three parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son.

We’re now at the second parable, here in **verse 8**:

“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?”

Luke 15:8

During these days, Palestinian women often received ten silver coins as a wedding gift. These coins would have had sentimental value as well as monetary value.

Bruce B. Barton, Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke (Tyndale, 1997), p. 371

Other sources I've read suggest that these coins were part of her wedding dowry; they would have been fashioned into a set worn as a head-dress, a beautiful jewelry set for her.

David E. Garland, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary: Luke (Zondervan, 2011), p. 615

We tend to think of the Middle East during these ancient days as plain and simple, certainly without jewelry to speak of.

The Bible actually corrects that opinion. In fact, the first biblical reference to jewelry dates 2,000 years earlier to the time of Abraham when Rebekah packed up to go and marry Isaac; she packs up jewelry made of gold and silver (Genesis 24).

Scientists have discovered and excavated the royal tombs at Ur, from which Abraham was called, and these tombs date even further back. A tomb of a queen who reigned 2900 years before the birth of Christ was found, she had been buried wearing a head-dress of gold, huge gold earrings, and gold rings on every finger.

In the New Testament times, believers were warned not to be flamboyant with their jewelry, for believing women not to be known by their gold jewelry but their gracious personality (I Peter 3:3-4).

James warns the church not to show preference to the wealthy man who shows up wearing a gold ring, a sign of great wealth (James 2:1-4).

Some believers have taken passages like these to forbid Christians from wearing any jewelry at all.

In fact, if I traveled today to preach in some eastern European country, unless I forgot, I wouldn't get up to preach wearing my gold wedding ring because that would be offensive to these believers.

Yet, later in our study of Luke 15, the father is going to welcome home his prodigal son and do what? Put a ring on his finger.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord recalls what He's done for Jerusalem with this poetic imagery: "I adorned you with jewelry; I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head" (Ezekiel 16:11-12).

Frankly, we can't even imagine the gemstones and crowns of gold given to the redeemed as they prepare to reign with Christ (Revelation 14 & 19).

By the way, God created gemstones and He evidently plans to display them in ways we can hardly imagine.

The Father's House, also known as the new Jerusalem, which will descend one day, is described by the apostle John as covered in precious gems; even the streets are made of translucent gold; the wall around the Celestial city is 200 feet thick and made of solid jasper, the entire wall is a gemstone, with its variety of shades in brown, yellow, red, and blue.

Each of the twelve foundations of the Father's House of gold features a different gemstone as a corner stone; these cornerstones will be the size of train cars, if not larger.

Whatever anybody might wear today is a mere shadow of the beauty and glory that we will one day see and enjoy.

Superstitions arose around jewelry of course. By the time of Christ, a Roman engagement ceremony would take place in the presence of witnesses. The man would place a ring on the fourth finger of the left hand of his bride to be; the ring would be crafted from iron symbolizing an unbreakable bond.

The engagement and wedding rings were placed on the fourth finger of the left hand because they believed a special vein ran between the fourth finger and the heart, communicating love.

They called it the *vena amoris* (the vein of love) and to this day, wedding rings are worn on the fourth finger of the left hand.

Jewels worn in weddings were considered precious, obviously, for more reasons than one.

Many Bible scholars believe that this woman here in Luke 15 has lost a coin, belonging to her wedding attire, part of her head-dress where the coins had been strung together and then used to drape over her head like some expensive veil. This was common during the days of Christ.

Caligula was the Roman emperor who reigned about four years after the Lord's resurrection and ascension. When Caligula got married, his bride arrived covered with emeralds and pearls interlaced into a head-dress, covering her head and ears down to her neck.

Pliny, the Roman historian, was there to see it and Pliny estimated that the cost of her wedding outfit would be equivalent in our day to somewhere around \$15 million dollars.

Any father of the bride today who wants to complain about wedding costs, start reading Pliny for devotions—it'll encourage you!

We can't know for sure that the woman here in this parable lost a coin from her headdress. Other scholars point to the fact that she could've been unmarried or widowed, but what we do know is that she was poor.

Luke refers to this coin as a *drachme*, a coin worth one day's wages for the average person.

Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor; *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1* (Zondervan, 2002), p. 446

She has 10 of them, so she has 10 days—two weeks-worth—of savings to her name.

This coin might not have anything to do with sentimental value, it might've been a matter of survival.

We're told here in **verse 8** that when she loses this coin:

“Does not [she] light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?”

Luke 15:8b

Here's another glimpse into her poverty. Peasant homes in these days were very dark, the floor was beaten earth, trampled hard and covered with dried reeds and tall grass. There would've been one little window—a simple opening in the wall—no more than 18 inches across.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 202

The fact that she's able to light her entire house with one lamp indicates her home would have been this typical mud brick, one room house that we would call a hut today.

To look for a coin on a floor covered with grass and reeds, with dirt cracks and crevices would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack. The smartest thing to do was to sweep up the entire floor and then sift through everything, piece by piece.

Don't forget that Jesus is describing here His own determination as He came to seek and to save that which was lost. This is a picture of the heart of God searching for lost sinners.

I love the analogy of one author who wrote: this is God in His grace, stooping down to find you in the dirty places of earth; bending down and sifting through the dust and debris, in order to lift the treasure of His redeemed from the garbage into which it has fallen.

Adapted from Ivor Powell, *Luke's Thrilling Gospel* (Kregel Publications, 1965), p. 335

Maybe you have the impression that you need to clean yourself up before coming to Christ; you need to straighten your life out before God will accept you.

Oh no, you've got it in the wrong order. He finds you, and He makes you acceptable.

He finds you in the dirt of the earth; in the dustbin of sin, covered with the grime of guilt. You don't clean yourself up before coming to Him; you come to Him and He will clean you up.

In fact, for the rest of your life, He will be cleaning you up and dusting you off until that day when His work is completed with your glorified, perfected heart, soul, and mind, as you enter the presence of the one who searched for you (Philippians 1:6). On that day, you will finally see your Shepherd, who searched for you, who took you from the realm of being lost into the realm of being found.

You say, "I want to be among those who've been found!" You can be, but you must first admit you are lost; you are covered with sin and in need of a Savior.

Now Jesus wants to make a contrast here. You might remember that the chapter began with the Pharisees and scribes—the religious leaders—*grumbling over sinners who've been received by Jesus*. **Verse 2: "and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled..."**

Keep that in mind. Jesus has received sinners and the religious leaders are grumbling. Now Jesus is going to contrast their *grumbling* with heaven *rejoicing*.

And He sets up the contrast as He finishes His parable here in **verse 9**:

"And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Luke 15:9-10

- **There is joy** (placed early in the sentence to emphasize it; there is this joyful celebration);
- **before the angels of God** (in the presence of the angels of God);
- **over one sinner who repents** (you could translate that: over every sinner who repents).

Now Jesus has made this point twice; when something lost is found, **verse 7**: there is **joy in heaven** and here again in **verse 10**: **there is joy in the presence of the angels**.

J.C. Ryle put it this way: this idea is repeated twice in order to meet our unbelief, that the perfect joy of heaven experiences moments of increase.

That the perfect joy of heaven actually experiences moments of even greater joy.

Why? Because someone lost has been found. An unredeemed sinner has just been saved.

And the celebration that's going on in heaven actually begins to celebrate even more.

Now we're typically told here that the angels are doing the celebrating along with God. There's no doubt the angels might be, with the Lord among them leading the way.

But what it says here is that the joy is taking place ***before, or in the presence of, the angels.***

Who else might be rejoicing?

Let's back up for a moment: whenever a believer dies, his spirit immediately goes to be with the Lord in the Father's House, that house of gold and precious gems.

Then, when the rapture occurs, Paul writes to the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 4, the buried bodies of those deceased believers are instantly reconstructed from their graves or from wherever their dust has migrated; they are physically raised and reunited with their spirits in glorified bodies designed for eternity.

Now if we are alive when the rapture takes place, our bodies are immediately transformed into glorified, immortal bodies like theirs and we rise to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Following that blink of an eye, we are whisked away to the Father's House as the tribulation begins on earth. Now following seven years of tribulation, we return with Christ to reign with Him on earth during His glorious kingdom.

Our subjects, over whom we will reign, are those who came to faith in Christ during the tribulation period. And they will be from every tongue and tribe all around the earth.

Now let's go back to the focus here on this celebration taking place in heaven in the presence of the angels upon the conversion of sinners—these spikes of joy in the joy meter, so to speak.

Who's celebrating in the presence of the angels? We have no reason to doubt that angels are joyful in the vindication brought to Jesus at a sinner's salvation.

But we also have no reason to doubt that those who are in the presence of the angels are none other than friends and family members of that unbeliever on earth who just came to faith in Christ, and they begin this joyful celebration.

Get this: their joy in heaven has just increased.

One author writes on this text, who but believers living in the Father's House would break out in celebration at the conversion of another lost sinner—a sinner they knew needed saving and they knew they hadn't been saved yet—but evidently they—and the angels—had some way of finding out that the lost sinner they knew has now joined the family of God and will one day join them in heaven.

Adapted from Randy Alcorn, *In Light of Eternity* (Waterbrook Press, 1999), p. 98

But maybe you're thinking, "I thought that when people got to heaven, they didn't care about anything happening on earth? Since they are now in the presence of God, why would they even care about something happening on earth?"

Well evidently, they do care.

Let me take you to one passage and give you some more clues to think about as you expand your vision of this celebration in heaven that Jesus is referring to here in Luke 15.

Turn over to Revelation chapter 6.

The tribulation is now taking place on earth here in Revelation 6. Thousands of people who've come to faith in Christ during the tribulation have already experienced martyrdom for their defiance of the antichrist.

They are now in heaven, before the throne of God, and listen to what they are saying; it's staggering in its implications.

Here in verse 10, they cry out:

"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Revelation 6:10-11

Let me make 5 quick observations about life in Heaven from this text:

They are themselves in heaven.

In other words, these martyred believers didn't go to heaven and morph into someone else—some mystical, floating creature with no conscious distinction from other creatures. They aren't absorbed into some kind of divine cosmos. They are individuals, connected to what happened to them on earth.

They are communicating with emotion with God.

We're told here they ***cried out with a loud voice***. Heaven isn't a place where we feel nothing or where we become stoics.

In fact, they are communicating out loud with words; in other words, heaven isn't a place where we robotically communicate emotionlessly, telepathically with each other. They're talking—passionately—with God.

They remember what happened to them on earth.

They remember they were unjustly murdered. And look at what they're calling for: ***judgment***. They want justice from God for their death, and they remember everything about it.

Now you'd think that remembering something bad that happened on earth would ruin heaven for them.

Evidently not.

Keep in mind that Jesus chose to retain His scars. He wants us to remember His crucifixion every time we look at Him, because He died for our sin!

And it isn't going to ruin heaven for us, it will remind us of His suffering that paved our path to heaven.

Likewise, the believer who's suffered on earth will find even greater joy in the deliverance from that suffering in heaven.

Listen beloved, remembering your troubles on earth won't depress you in heaven, it will deepen your joy in heaven, as you come to understand the wisdom of God in how He did indeed work all things together for your good and His glory.

They are given the answer to their passionate prayer, and here's the answer from God: wait.

Wait! The same answer you've been given time and time again is the answer they are given here from God.

They ask the Lord, ***"How long before You will judge and avenge our blood?"*** How long Lord, do we wait until You make everything right? And they are told here to ***"rest a little longer."***

And that is a big difference. Waiting in heaven for God to act is the same thing as ***resting***. Down here, waiting is frustrating. But up there waiting is resting, because of our perfected

perspective, in the presence of our Sovereign God, we will confidently know that waiting is resting.

So, if you want to act like they do up there, rest while you wait; His plans will come to pass.

One more observation:

God tells them that some of their friends and companions are going to be murdered as well.

Now you'd think that would ruin heaven for them. They've been martyred and now the Lord tells them that some of their friends will suffer as well.

Don't miss this: happiness in heaven isn't based on ignorance of what's happening on earth.

Our joy is based on seeing earth with God's perspective, like these martyred believers do: that God is sovereign and in control, which is why they began their prayer here with words, "O Sovereign Lord."

The Lord has just told them something that's going to happen on Earth: *their brothers will be killed* in the near future.

If the Lord tells them that something is going to happen on earth in the *near* future, that means the Lord can also communicate to them that something *just* happened on earth, something they would care deeply about that would increase their joy.

Namely, the conversion of someone they knew. Listen, that someone they knew wasn't a Christian when they died and went to heaven, but they have just now become a Christian.

This is breaking news in heaven, and with that breaking news, a celebration begins.

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