

Seeking the Lost

Luke 15

Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer, wanted to be known more as a rescue mission worker than a great hymn writer even though she wrote about 9000 hymns.

She worked in the Water Street Mission in Manhattan which was founded to minister to alcoholics. The mission was started by Maria, a former prostitute, and Jerry McAuley, a former alcoholic, thief and convict. She also volunteered at the Bowery Mission in Manhattan.

She once was addressing a large group of men at the Bowery Mission when she said to the men, "Is there some young man here tonight who has wandered from his mother's teaching?" At the end of the service an eighteen year old man came forward and said, "Did you mean me? I have promised my mother to meet her in heaven; but as I am now living that will be impossible." Crosby prayed with him and then he testified, "Now, I can meet mother in heaven; for I have found her God."

That evening on the way home from the mission the words "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying" came to her mind. That evening when she arrived at home, she wrote the entire song before retiring for the night.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.

Though they are slighting Him, still He is waiting,
Waiting the penitent child to receive;
Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently;
He will forgive if they only believe

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.

Rescue the perishing, duty demands it;
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way patiently win them;
Tell the poor wanderer a Savior has died.

Crosby not only cared for drunkards but the elderly who could not support themselves. She was a lobbyist for the blind. During the Civil War she fought for the freeing of slaves. She was an advocate for orphans and single moms.

Fanny Crosby was like her Saviour, especially as Luke presents Him. The Gospel of Luke has been called the Gospel for the Outcast.

1. Jesus cared for the lost, the outcasts, the marginalized, and rescued them (15:1). Luke records Jesus referring to the poor beggar, Lazarus (16:10-31), healing lepers (17:11-19), speaking of mistreated widows (18:1-8) and despised tax collectors (18:9-14). Jesus cared for the street walkers, drug dealers and the Mafia of His day.
2. The Pharisees, on the other hand, criticized Jesus for helping the lost and repelled them (15:2). They criticized Jesus for receiving sinners.
3. Jesus responded to that accusation which was really a proclamation of truth. Jesus explained why He received the lost in three parables.

1. Because Sinners Have All Gone Astray (15:3-7)

A. God seeks sinners who are like sheep lost and in danger. “All we like sheep have gone astray” according to Isaiah 53:6. Just as the sheep would wander close to the edge of a cliff, sinners are lost and in danger of falling into Hell.

B. God finds those He seeks. Shepherds were expert trackers for sheep. Jesus compared Himself to a Shepherd. “I am the good shepherd and I lay down my life for the sheep.” He tracked us all the way from heaven.

C. God rejoices when He finds us. The Pharisees grumbled. God rejoices over the sinner repents and weeps over the self-righteous who do not even think they need to repent.

2. Because Sinners Are Valuable to God (15:8-10)

A. God seeks sinners who are in darkness. Not only were shepherds despised but so were poor women. The shepherd travelled a long distance to track and the woman searched her little dark room diligently with her light. Most poor homes in Jesus’s day had only one small window to let in light.

B. God finds us when He opens our blinded eyes when someone like the woman in the parable brings the light of the gospel to the lost in darkness.

C. God rejoices when He finds His prize. We are so valuable to God that He paid for us with the precious blood of His son. The silver in this parable was a Greek coin not a Roman coin. This is the only place this coin is used in the Bible. God not only paid for the Jews and Romans but the Gentiles. His Son died for all nationalities and races. We might be prejudice but God isn’t.

D. The sinner repents and not only does God rejoice but all of heaven rejoices. What makes heaven rejoice? Is it what makes us rejoice? When our favorite team wins the

World Series or the Superbowl? No! When we get a promotion at work? No! When we lead someone to Christ.

3. Because God is Gracious (15:11-32)

The man in the third parable has two sons. A younger who was a sinner and his older who was a pharaoh.

A. The Younger Brother was a Sinner. We call this son the prodigal son. The Younger Son Sinned (15:11-16). He valued money more than relationships (15:12-13). He hooked the u-haul to his clunker and headed off to the big city. He experienced famine and not freedom (15:13-16). Soon the rush was over. He was like a skydiver who felt the rush just after he leaps from the plane but shortly realizes he has no parachute.

The Younger Son Repented (15:17-19). In the first two parables lostness and repentance were illustrated with a sheep and coin. In this parable, lostness and repentance are exemplified by a real person. Some parent's son, some brother's or sister's brother, some wife's husband or some son and daughter's dad.

John Piper spoke of Homewood Memorial Gardens just outside Chicago where 20 to 30 people are buried each month. Who were they? People who have nobody that knows or cares about them. They just die. Someone finds them on the street or in a park or in an alley or in a lonely apartment. The officials search for relatives. The Medical Examiner's Office waits and holds the bodies. When no one comes forward to claim the body, a hundred-eighty-foot long trench is dug at the cemetery and the wooden boxes are lined up next to each other and buried. No stone. And no marker.

The prodigal son does not want his life to end in this kind of lostness. He admits he has sinned against God (15:18). He takes full responsibility for his life (15:19).

The Younger Son was received (15:20-24). Just as God seeks sinners as the shepherd and woman God receives the humble repentant sinner. The father ran, kissed, hugged, and rejoiced over his wayward son returning. There are great emotions experienced in this reunion. This is how God feels. He feels like you would feel if that son or daughter you are praying for would respond this morning and meet you at this altar. How would you feel? That is how God feels when someone He created for Himself returns to Him.

B. The older brother was a Pharisee (15:25-32). Whereas the younger brother illustrates the sinners that Jesus receives, the older brother represents the Pharisees who murmured "He receives sinners and eats with them" (15:25-27).

The older brother boasted in his outward self-righteousness "I serve you." "I never transgressed." This reminds us of the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14. The older brother though at home did not have a personal relationship with his father. He viewed his father as his employer from whom he drew a check. He was on the outside working in the field while

everyone else was in the house celebrating. This is how Pharisees view salvation. They work for it.

The older brother was angry and critical. He was angry at God pictured in his father. He disrespectfully speaks to his father: "Look old man." He was angry at his father for receiving back his sinful but repentant brother.

He was critical of others pictured in his brother whom he was unwilling to forgive. The true believer loves God and his neighbor (Luke 10:25-28).

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "In my years of preaching and pastoral ministry, I have met elder brothers (and sisters!) who have preferred nursing their anger to enjoying the fellowship of God and God's people. Because they will not forgive, they have alienated themselves from the church and even from their family; they are sure that everyone else is wrong and they alone are right. They can talk loudly about the sins of others, but they are blind to their own sins."

"I never forgive!" General Oglethorpe said to John Wesley, to which Wesley replied, "Then, sir, I hope you never sin."

The father, like God, responded to both sons. The father ran to meet his prodigal son when he returned. The father also went out to speak to his Pharisee son. Both sons were lost. One was lost and wayward the other was lost and still at home. He received his sinful son and would have received his Pharisee son. God receives all sinners.