

## INTRODUCTION

### AMAZING GRACE

One of the most well known, well loved, well sung Christian hymns, is John Newton's *Amazing Grace*.

If you've been around church for any length of time, you've probably sung it at least once.

At least once you have sung the words 'I once was Lost but now am found, was blind but now I see'.

Here's a question to think about.

What do you mean when you sing these words?

I was a fan of TV show LOST, right up until the final episode.

The title of the show, could be understood on a number of levels.

It was about a group of air crash survivors, LOST on a desert island.

They were lost geographically

But as the show progresses, we see they were also lost psychologically.

As Christians what do we mean when we sing "I once was Lost"?

In today's passage from Luke 15. Jesus teaches us what it means to say that we once were Lost, but now we're Found.

### CONTEXT

But before we get into the passage, it's important to understand the context of Jesus teaching.

We see the context and setting of Jesus teaching in opening two verses.

*1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

Jesus had been attracting a crowd, but the religious leaders, the pharisees and the teachers of the law were getting annoyed, concerned, cynical. Jesus was welcoming and spending time with tax collectors and sinners, people who the Pharisees and probably written off as not just a lost cause, too far gone — but also, raised questions about whether Jesus had any moral compass at all. Why would he hang out with such corrupt people?

### JESUS ANSWERS IN PARABLES

And so we read in v3, that Jesus response to their concerns is in the form of a parable.

### PARABLES NOT SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

It's important to note, that when Jesus spoke in parables, it wasn't his way of giving a sermon illustration. In fact it often had the opposite purpose of a sermon illustration.

Jesus would speak in parables, not always to make a truth easier to understand, but rather it was a way of Jesus talking about deep spiritual truths, truths that could potentially be very offensive; but the offence wouldn't be immediately obvious to those who weren't particular interested at digging deeper.

And so he responds to the Pharisees and religious leaders in these parables in chapter 15.

### THREE OR FOUR PARABLES

You can divide this chapter up into 3 parables, 2 shorter parables and one longer one, or as we will see a bit later, I think it can also think the third parable is actually two parables, which parallels, and mirrors the first two.

### THE FIRST TWO

Let's look at the first two parables first.

Let's look carefully at what Jesus' response teaches us about his approach to people who some might see as 'a lost cause'.

### QUICK SKIM

A quick skim read, we see that the first parable is about a man who loses one of his sheep, goes to find it, returns home and publicly rejoices at finding his lost sheep.

The second parable is similar, this time it involves a woman who loses one of her ten coins, turns the house upside down until she finds it, and again publicly rejoices when she does.

### A FEW OBVIOUS THINGS

There's a few obvious things we can learn, but easily miss on a skim read.

### BOTH ABOUT AN OWNER

First is, that in both parables, they are stories about an owner of a number of items, losing only one, and being absolutely dedicated, almost obsessed with finding it. And when they do they rejoice and let everyone know.

I frequently have to turn my house upside down when I lose an AirPods. Has anyone seen my airpod. You know the feeling when your favourite puzzle is suddenly missing a piece?

In these first two parables, what is Jesus implying in his response to the religious leaders concern that he welcomes sinners and other 'lost souls'?

### JESUS POSITIONING HIMSELF AS OWNER AND SINNERS PRECIOUS TO HIM

Is it possible that he is positioning himself as the rightful owner of these sinners and lost causes, and that they are precious to him?

### THE FIRST THING WE CAN LEARN

— LOST = FROM OUR OWNER & PRECIOUS TO THEM

That's the first thing we can learn from this passage about what Jesus means by being LOST.

Primarily it means being LOST from our owner, our maker.

Often we refer to being LOST more from our perspective,

'where is my life going, I feel lost' — and this is true, especially when we are lost from our maker.

But the primary sense of the idea of being lost in this passage, is from the perspective of the owner. Which is far weightier when you think about it, because it also means that those who are lost from their owner, are also precious to the owner.

There is no such thing, no such person who we can see as a lost cause, in the sense of giving up on them, like the Pharisees want Jesus to do.

Yes, we might know and care for many people who are currently lost from God.

But we must remember also, that they are precious to God and God is dearly wants to bring them home.

### THE SECOND THING WE CAN LEARN FROM FIRST TWO PARABLES HOW THEY DESCRIBE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE FOUND

The second thing we see from these first two parables is the words that Jesus chooses to describe what it means to be found, from the perspective of the person who is LOST>

### REPENT USAGE v7 & 10

Jesus uses the word 'Repent' in both of the first two parables.

See in v7

*7 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 persons who do not need to repent.*

and then in v10

*10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

#### REPENT MEANING

The word REPENT, from the greek word meta-noia means change of mind, mindset, attitude. It is frequently used in the context of a relationship, particularly in the context of reconciliation of relationships.

#### WHY USE THIS WORD IN THIS CONTEXT?

So why does Jesus use this word, in the context of parables talking about an owner finding their lost possessions?

#### ESSENTIAL DIVIDE

Well this brings us to the essential divide that distinguishes between those who are LOST and those who are FOUND.

#### NOT ABOUT LOCATION OR RELATIVE PROXIMITY

According to Jesus the divide between that which is lost and that which is found, is not primarily about someones location, or relative proximity.

#### ABOUT WHO THEY ARE LOST FROM

It is much more about WHO they are lost from.

Repentance, is essential to transformed relationship.

A transformed way of relating, thinking about someone.

#### EXAMPLE HEALTHY MARRIAGE NEEDS REGULAR REPENTANCE

For example, in a healthy marriage, regular repentance is so so important.

It's not simply about changing behaviour, or habits - but it is fuelled by a change of attitude.

Being able to say “I was wrong. I was selfish. I was not loving you. I haven't been treating you as you deserve.”

#### JESUS INTENTIONALLY INSERTS RELATIONAL LANGUAGE

And so Jesus, quite intentionally and quite profoundly, inserts this transformational relational language of repentance, into his two parables about what it means for someone to be lost and then to be found.

## FOCUSSED ON SIMILARITIES OF FIRST TWO, WHAT ABOUT DIFFERENCES?

So far we've focussed on the similarities between the first two parables and not so much the differences. Before we look at the third parable, let's look at a couple of key differences between the two.

## WHY REPETITION? JESUS MAKING SAME POINT?

When you read this section, do you sometimes wonder why Jesus told two short parables, essentially making the same point, just using sheep in one and coins in another?

## CLOSER INSPECTION. KEY DIFFERENCE UNLOCK + UNDERSTAND THIRD PARABLE.

Well on closer inspection, I think there is a key difference between these two short parables, and this difference will help us unlock and understand more fully the third parable.

## MOST OFFENSIVE THING JESUS SAYING (IN PRESENCE OF PHARISEES)

And In fact I think this key difference helps us unlock perhaps the most offensive thing Jesus is saying in the presence of the pharisees and the religious leaders, yet because it is in the form of a parable, they wouldn't have felt the full force of Jesus words just yet.

Here's the key difference between the sheep and the coin parables.

## KEY DIFFERENCE- LOCATION OF LOST OBJECT TO OWNER

Think about the location of the lost sheep and the lost coin relative to the owner.

We read in v4&5, the lost sheep is lost quite a distance from home, from the owner

And what about the lost coin

We read in v8, the most coin is lost, not away from home, but in the house.

But turns the light on, overturns everything until the lost coin is found.

And I think these two different locations of the lost sheep and the lost coin, are key to understanding the force of Jesus next parable, and particularly his words in the presence of the religious leaders.

Something can be lost a long way away from their owner, like the sheep; and something can also be lost relatively close to their owner, like the coin.

## LIKE WHEN TALKING REPENTANCE WE'VE SEEN JESUS CONCERNED ABOUT RELATIONSHIP LOSTNEDS

Remember, when we were talking about repentance, we've already seen that to Jesus to be Lost and then to be found, is not about a change in location, but about a change in relationship to someones owner.

### THIRD PARABLE

And so as we now turn to the third, possibly the more well known parable in this chapter, Jesus brings this truth home at a deeply personal, relational level.

It's a parable not just about any broken relationship between owner and possession, but it is about a broken family bond.

This parable is often called the parable of the prodigal son.

I think in this context it is more helpfully titled the parable of the two lost sons.

And in the parable we see two sons, both who are lost to their father, but their lostness manifests itself in two different ways.

### YOUNGER SON LOST FROM HIS FATHER SHOWN BY HIS REQUEST

We see the younger son is lost from his father, first by his request that he wants to his Father to give him his share of the inheritance before his Father's death, so he take his possessions and newly inherited wealth and go and spend it. Essentially he is saying to his Father. I wish you were dead. I wish you were out of my life.

### YOUNGER SON LEAVES FATHER'S HOME (LIKE LOST SHEEP)

A bit like the lost sheep, leaves his Father's home and travels to a distant country. Spends all his Father's money. Lives a life free from any accountability to his Father, doing what he wants, when he wants.

And as time passes, after spending everything, and being left with nothing he realises that what he needed most of all was not his Father's money, but his Father himself.

### V17 KEY VERSE COMING TO SENSES

And there is a key verse there in v17,  
Jesus says of the younger son, "When he came to his senses"  
Why is that description so important?

### REPENTENCE

Because Jesus is describing repentance. A change of mind.  
He realised that to be with Father, even as a servant and slave, is better by far than being apart from him. So he heads home

### BEAUTIFUL DESCRIPTION OF FATHER

And we get this beautiful description of the the Father not just waiting for his Son, but looking out for him, able to spot him from distance. And the Father runs to him full of joy, tears and celebration.

The Father has found his precious son.

#### EXAMPLE OF LOSING MY SON

I remember the first time I lost my son, very briefly, when he was 3, was only like about 10-15 minutes when we were onIt felt like an eternity. But when I found him, it was like no other feeling of relief I had experienced.

And so this Father celebrates and has a massive once in a generation party.

Why?

v24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. '

So that's the first son, the younger son. In Jesus' parable, his story has a beginning, a middle and an end. The son lost, away from the father, away from home.

#### WHAT ABOUT OLDER SON - ALSO LOST - CLOSE TO HOME

What about the older son?

Well here we see the older son is also LOST, but he is lost close to home.

He hasn't left his father's side, geographically.

But we discover that he is along way from his Father's side, in terms of his heart.

It's very clear, that he doesn't share the same delight that his Dad does that his younger brother has returned home.

In fact he is unable to even refer to him as his brother.

And so, like the woman who lost the coin in her home, who turns the light on and sweeps away the junk, the Father goes out to his older son, and pleads with the older son to come in and share his celebration.

What is it that the Father is wanting from the older son?

#### FATHER WANTS REPENTANCE FROM OLDER SON - CHANGE ATTITUDE

He wants repentance doesn't he?

He wants a change of mindset, change of heart, change of thinking about how precious the family is to the Father.

And in the older sons response, at least so far in this parable, we see he is still LOST from his Dad.

Notice the way he articulates his anger in v29-30

29 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. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

He sees himself as a slave to his Father, not a Son.

His security and foundation has always been in his lifelong obedience to his Father's orders.

What the older son really wanted, was in essence same as what the younger son really wanted before his repentance.

He wanted to take the Father's money, the Father's stuff, to enjoy it away from the Father, in this case 'to celebrate with his friends'.

He cannot understand why the Father is celebrating when the younger son deserves to be punished, to be an outcast due to his foolish choices.

The older brother just doesn't understand how profoundly precious he and his brother are to his Father - based entirely on the fact they are the Father's children.

And as our passage closes, with the Father trying one last time, to shine a light on the sons lostness.

Reiterating again what is so precious to the Father is that his Children are with him

31 "My son, 'the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 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.'"

Now we don't know whether the elder brother came in and celebrated or whether he stubbornly refused and stayed out in the field

**NO CLEAR ENDING TO OLDER BROTHER STORY**

Unlike the younger brother  
the older brothers story doesn't have a clear ending.



And the reason I think is because of Jesus immediate audience.

Remember the pharisees, murmuring and complaining about Jesus concern and taking joy in being with those who had in past walked along way away from God.

In this teaching, Jesus has put these religious leaders clearly in the place of the older brother.

And in a sense they too have an opportunity to repent, to come alongside Jesus, to share the Father's joy, to share his mission to seek and save the lost.

OR they can continue dig their heels in and stubbornly refuse to join Jesus celebration, revealing that they, not the tax collectors and sinners are the ones that remain lost at the end of these events.

So there is a big question mark over the end of their story.  
Where will they end up?

**IS THERE A BIG QUESTION MARK AT THE END OF YOUR STORY?**

As we conclude, it's worth us all thinking about whether there is a question mark over the end of your story?

**CONCLUSION**

As we finish, lets just tie together what Jesus has taught us today about what it means to be lost and what it means to be found.

It's significant that John Newton's hymn doesn't *sing*  
"I once was lost, but then I found",  
Because that's the opposite of what Jesus has been teaching us today.  
Itsays but now am found

**LOST (TO OUR OWNER) & FOUND (BY OUR OWNER)**

We have learnt that,  
    when Jesus says we are lost,  
        He says we are primarily lost to our maker, our owner  
    and when Jesus says we are found,  
        we are found by our maker.

**PRECIOUS TO OUR FATHER,  
WE ARE FOUND AT A GREAT COST TO HIMSELF**

And more than that  
    We have learnt are precious to our heavenly Father,  
        even though we walked away from him,  
            he has come to us at great cost to himself,  
                and sent his own Son Jesus

to find us and bring us back to him.

Do you see yourself as someone who not only belongs to your Father in heaven, but is so precious to your heavenly Father?

## DIFFERENT WAYS PEOPLE CAN BE LOST FROM GOD

We have also learnt that to be lost from God, can manifest itself differently for different people.

Like the Sheep and the Coin. The younger and the older brother.

We can be lost away from the things of God or we can be lost surrounded by rule based, enslaving religion, having the appearance of being close to God.

We can be lost from our Father, wanting our heavenly Father as good as dead, out of our life. In our desire to be free from accountability, we want to take the Father's stuff but have nothing to do with the Father himself.

Or we can be lost buried in religion, without relationship. Like the Pharisees. Talking stuff of God. Doing stuff in the name of God. But actually really not interested in God, more interested in what God can do for them, their status, their sense of pride and moral superiority.

Perhaps a reflection for us this morning is:

Are we in danger of being a bit like the older brother, going on auto-pilot with our church life, and yet no interest in a real relationship with God, not interested in being with the Father, not delighting in sharing our heavenly Father's joy, his Father's passion, his Father's mission, to seek and save the lost?

Perhaps a reflection and a prayer for us as we finish is that we would all, like the younger brother, come to our senses, and repent — so that we would come to see clearly that life with our heavenly Father, who made us, who treats us as his precious children, is far better than any life that is lived, without the Father.

Let's pray.