

Lost and Found (Part 2 of 2)

We considered in the previous study the lost sheep. The next parable moves on and looks at a different 'lost' situation. The first parable is drawn from Christ's perspective. This next parable is from an ecclesial perspective. Again there are parts of the story that don't seem rational. Why search in the dark instead of waiting for daylight? How many of us would call our friends and neighbours to a party because we had found a virtually worthless coin?

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver [Gk. *drachma*], if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:8-10)

So the first question is this. Who is the woman? This is an honest, diligent woman; not a harlot but someone respected by friends and neighbours. This woman is symbolic of the ecclesia. Paul speaks of the ecclesia in terms of the bride of Christ: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31,32).

So what is the house that is in darkness? The house and the darkness that is in it are the world and its godless wicked ways. Paul refers to “the darkness of this world” (Ephesians 6:12). The woman (the ecclesia) lives in the dark world and uses the light to shine into the corners to find lost coins. That light is Christ: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:21).

The silver coins are parallel to the sheep in the previous parable. Interestingly the word translated “silver” is the word *drachma*. This is the only occurrence in the New Testament. It was only worth a very small amount. In fact it was the most common coin in the Roman empire. It was equal to the Roman penny. The light is that of Christ and of the Truth that we, the ecclesial woman, hold and point into the dark recesses of the world. We are looking for lost coins!

So as an ecclesia we are looking into the world (just as Christ is looking for lost sheep) to find lost coins – lost people who understand that in God's eyes they are worth very little. Why? Because they are sinful! The coin was made of silver and this represents those who go through trials: “For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried”. (Psalm 66:10). So we too are tried like silver.

We go into the world and shine as lights to bring lost people (that is, sinful people) to a knowledge of the Truth. It is those who are POOR in spirit and meek who will inherit the earth. Not those who think they have great value and are proud.

So we are as an ecclesia going through the same process enacted by Christ. We are looking for the same type of person. A repentent sinner. Think of these words of Christ.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:13-14)

We note the final statement which is *similar* but not exactly the same as in the first parable. There is joy in presence of angels over one sinner that repents. Note there is no mention of heaven – the joy is here on earth, shared by the angels who are ever present with us, although unseen.

We shine the light of God's Truth on the lost people who are in the dark parts of the world, and if they repent they have been found, resulting in much rejoicing. This parable then is speaking of the preaching work we are called upon to engage in, in order to bring those in the world to Christ – to find those who are lost.

Finally we move on to the parable of the lost (or prodigal) son. This is now speaking of those *in* the ecclesia who subsequently leave. In other words they were found by Christ, baptised into his name, but then are lost again.

We have a father with his two sons. These sons are both living at home at the start of the parable. This is a picture involving the ecclesia. The father represents God, the house is the ecclesia, and the son who leaves the house is a brother or sister who returns to the world, drawn by its shadowy attractions. The son *joins* himself to a citizen of another country (verse 15). “What? Know ye not that he which is joined [same word] to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is *joined* unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:16,17). He had been joined with his Father but now he is joined with harlots. He was found but now is lost.

The son wants his inheritance NOW. He does not wish to wait any longer. The inheritance is of course the future kingdom. But why wait for that when he can eat, drink and be merry now? He asks the Father for his inheritance and that Father gives him what he desires.

God allows him to go. But then He waits – He waits for him to make the first move – He waits for repentance.

He does not go looking for him. It is a divine principle: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 1:3).

The prodigal son already knows what is in his father’s house. He has been found once before by Christ. He knows that God loves him and knows what Christ has done for him. So God waits. He allows him to end up in a pigsty – with nothing. Only then does the son realise his folly. Finally the son in the pits of despair returns. Note however that when the son begins to travel home (repentant) that his Father runs to meet him. God will respond as soon as we do.

There are some powerful lessons here on which to base our actions with a wayward brother or sister. This is how we should react towards those who leave the Truth. We should try to persuade them to stay but if they go back into the world we must let them go – and wait ...

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” (Matthew 18:17)

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Having warned to no avail, we leave the brother or sister to the Lord God. We cut ourselves off from those who go back into the world.

“But now I have written unto you *not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.*” For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore *put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*” (1 Corinthians (5:11-13)

Note here how these verses are so similar to the parable – Let them go –Do *not* eat with someone who calls himself a brother – Let God deal with them; He will bring them to repentance *not* us.

These verses speak clearly about how we should have *nothing to do* with those who commit open fornication and sin and yet say that they do nothing wrong. Bear in mind these are speaking of those who are brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; *and avoid them.*” (Romans 16:17)

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye *withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.*” (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

Study by Brother Andy Walton – Tewkesbury Ecclesia

“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and *have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.*” (verse 14)

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, *receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.*” (2 John 1:10)

“*Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.*” (1Corinthians 5:7)

“I wrote unto you in an epistle *not to company with fornicators.*” (verse 9)

God will bring the person into a pigsty, to chasten and to bring low and then, and *only* then, will they come to their senses and change and hopefully *repent!*

As soon as a repentent attitude is forthcoming which should (like our Heavenly Father) rush out to meet them.

This is why we are given the example of the other brother at the end of the parable. His reaction was wholly different. He showed no compassion to his repentant brother. In fact we are told he was angry. He could not understand when his brother had caused so much upset and grief why he should be welcomed home. In fact the son who remained at home had become pharasaical himself. I have never transgressed at any time your commandments he said to his Father. This could not be true – we all remain sinful and require ongoing repentance.

Let us ensure that if and when a brother or sisters leaves the Turth that we ready (if and when they repent) to welcome them with open arms. Let us run to meet them and rejoice once more that they have been found.

In conclusion, we have seen that it is Christ who seeks and first calls the lost and truly repentant. We have seen that the ecclesia in Christ also has to perform that task as we illuminate the dark recesses of humanity with the One who is the light of the world. We must look for lost people in the world who truly understand that they *are* lost through sin. And we must warn those of our number who want to leave, to think twice. If they do leave, we have cut ourselves off from them and wait for our Father to put them in circumstances that will bring them back, when we will welcome them with open arms.

Brother Andy Walton (Tewkesbury)