

**Introduction:** We began our study of parables with the “Two Builders” parable which instructs believers to build a strong foundation for life, one able to withstand the storms they will inevitably encounter. Next, we studied the eight parables of Matthew 13, all dealing with the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus spoke the first four to a crowd by the lake. They are the (1.) “Sower,” (2.) “Wheat and Tares,” (3.) “Mustard Seed,” and (4.) “Yeast.”

The message conveyed by these four parables is: (1.) “Sower.” When God’s Word is spread in the world, only some who hear will respond by becoming faithful, productive believers. (2.) “Wheat and Tares.” Both within the world and specifically within the company of believers, the enemy “sows” counterfeit believers who cannot be distinguished from the real thing until the end of the age. (3 - 4.) “Mustard Seed and Yeast.” Opposition to believers will begin small but, because of the sinful nature of the fallen world, will grow very large and widespread.

Later that same day, Jesus, in private, spoke four additional parables to His disciples. These were the (1.) “Hidden Treasure,” (2.) Pearl of Great Value,” (3.) “Draagnet,” and (4.) “Householder.”

The message of these four private parables is: (1.) “Hidden Treasure.” The great value Christ places on the as yet unconverted individuals who represent a vast treasure hidden in plain sight in the world as sinners in a world heavy with sin. (2.) “Pearl of Great Value.” The enormous value God places on the “complete company of believers” taken together through all time. (3.) “Draagnet.” Through all ages, God’s draagnet catches the behavior of every kind of people, good and bad. At the end of time, the good will be separated from the bad. (4.) “Householder.” Jesus asked His disciples if they understood all He was teaching them. Their answer was yes. Jesus responded with a parable about the accountability of those who preach and teach God’s Word. Those proclaiming God’s Word must do so with preparation, understanding, and accuracy in such manner that those who listen will clearly and unambiguously hear the promises of God and what is expected of those who believe.

**Next Step:** Our next parables are in Luke 15. These are 3 closely related parables which deal with God’s concern for the lost: The: (1.) “Lost Sheep,” (2.) “Lost Coin,” and (3.) “Lost Son.” The central theme is *The Father’s Yearning Love for the Lost*. This theme is emphasized throughout the three parables.

A shepherd who has a hundred sheep loses one. He focuses on finding and restoring that one sheep. A woman has 10 coins, loses one of them, and diligently searches her house until she finds the one which was lost. A father has two sons, one leaves home under disrespectful circumstances, the other remains at home. The father's heart goes out to the son who left home. Rather than chastising that son when he eventually returns, the father welcomes him back to his heart and home.

What circumstances led Jesus to speak these parables about seeking the lost?

**Parable of the Lost Sheep:** Luke 15:1-7, *“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”*

This parable is the first of the 3 parables showing the heart of God and the focus of Christ's mission. God loves His people even though they are lost in rebellion to Him. God's mission in Christ is to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). The “Lost Sheep” parable challenges each believer to look at their own hearts, and strive to be like God in their compassion for the lost. Christ is the only hope both for the lost and for believers.

Tax collectors and sinners, recognizing they are needy, have gathered near to hear Jesus. There are also Pharisees and scribes in the crowd. They grumble that Jesus is soiling Himself by receiving such contaminating people. Associating with such people was bad. Eating with them was totally outrageous because eating with someone meant accepting them. Yet, associating and eating with these needy people was exactly what Jesus was often seen doing.

Jesus even selected a tax-collector to be one of “The Twelve,” those disciples closest to Him. In Luke 19:10 Jesus clearly states His earthly mission, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* The righteous (if there are any) need no help. The self-righteous (those who believe themselves to be righteous) think they don't need help and don't seek any. It is those who know they are sinners who are

ripe for harvest. In recognizing their lostness, and the necessity of help if their condition is to change, they are on the right path. Jesus is there to greet them.

Following the dictates of His Mission, Jesus associates with the lost including tax-collectors and sinners. He meets them where they are in order to deliver them from their sinful ways and raise them up to the genuine holiness required by God's Law (Leviticus 19:2). Meanwhile, the rabbis and scribes pronounce and pose. Jesus seeks the lost, honors the Law, and changes sinful lives.

**Tax-collectors:** In conquered areas, the Romans collected taxes by selling the right to collect taxes to the highest bidder. That person was given the right in a specified region to levy tolls on exports and imports as well as on merchandise transported within the region. The main tax offices were in Caesarea, Capernaum, and Jericho.

Those who bought the right to collect taxes sold subsidiary rights to a group immediately below them called the "chief publicans" (Luke 19:2). The chief publicans, in turn, hired "publicans" to do the actual tax collecting. Since they worked in the service of Rome, publicans were deemed to be extortionists and traitors.

**Tax-collectors and Sinners Who Drew Near to Jesus:** The "tax collectors" who drew near to Jesus were likely publicans of the lowest level. They knew their reputation for fleecing the public. But they were attracted to Jesus who was reaching out to them. What would Jesus have to say? They wanted to know. So, they sought Him out. The Pharisees and scribes had no interest in societies lowest levels, but were interested in stopping Jesus' ministry. They believed Jesus was wasting His time. They grumbled saying, *"This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

**Complaints Against Jesus:** The Pharisees and scribes (the legalists of Jesus' day) criticized Jesus for devoting time to "sinners." Such people were deemed to be out of bounds to decent people, and to be unwelcome and unacceptable to God. These legalists saw Jesus claim to be a holy man speaking for God as contradicted by His spending time in the presence of sinners.

Jesus replies to their criticisms with the three parables about the lost. As He does so, He deftly repositions the conversation. He demonstrates that far from associating with tax collectors and sinners being questionable, His association with them represents the very heartbeat of the joy of heaven. We see this in the parable of the "Lost Sheep."

**The Lost Sheep:** It's a familiar story. A man has a hundred sheep. One is lost. What does he do? Does he rejoice that only one is lost? Most of his flock is safe and sound. Does he then focus on protecting and nourishing the safe majority? No,! Making provision for the 99 in open country, he immediately seeks the missing one.

The analogy of God's people as His sheep was a familiar one to those hearing Jesus. They would have had no doubt Jesus was talking about people, not sheep. If Jesus had been talking about real sheep, every shepherd in the crowd would have admitted that they too would leave the ninety-nine and go after the one.

**Turning the Table on the Complainers:** By speaking of rejoicing in heaven over the repentance of one sinner, Jesus contrasts the joy in heaven with the "religious elite's" lack of concern. What an astounding difference. The "religious elite" do not see themselves as sinners in need of repentance. They seem to have no concern for those who do need repentance. Heaven's different attitude is vastly more important than the grumbling complaints of the pious Pharisees and scribes.

From Scripture, we know no one is righteous apart from Christ (Romans 3:10). Only God's grace and mercy through Christ bestows on us Christ's righteousness (Luke 18:9-14). All were lost sinners before Christ saved us!

Most commentators see the 99 who are said to need no repentance as referring to self-righteous people. God and heaven rejoice over one sinner who genuinely repents, but will not rejoice over 99 self-righteous persons. The 99 self-righteous persons seems to refer to the Pharisees, scribes, and their followers.

The parable of the "Lost Sheep" demonstrates God's intense focus on those who remain lost. It should remind each believer that God is not merely delighted in those who believe. He is fervently interested in those who do not yet know Him, and so should we be.

**The Good Shepherd:** In John 10:14-15, Jesus revealed Himself as the Good Shepherd who would lay down His life down for His sheep. He goes on to say in John 10:16, "*And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*"

When God redeemed us, our redemption was intended to be a beginning, not an end. Believers are to focus on God's concerns. A major concern is that He has many sheep yet to be brought into the fold. God's mission in Christ is saving the lost. It is astonishing, but true, that God chooses believers as His ambassadors to bring in the lost sheep. How are we doing at that task?

In order to participate in God's mission we, like the shepherd, must leave behind comfort zones and selfish desires as we seek those still lost. If joy is missing in a believers' lives or in a church, the first remedy is to emulate God and seek the lost.

**The Lost Coin:** Luke 15:8-10, *“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? <sup>9</sup> 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.’ <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Broadly speaking, this parable makes the same point as the “Lost Sheep.” The most common interpretation of the parable is that the woman is young and unmarried. The ten silver coins are her carefully preserved dowry. They are likely braided into her hair. The loss of one coin is a disaster. A frantic, extremely thorough search would certainly follow. The parable emphasizes the effort and diligence necessary to find the lost coin. When the coin is found, there is joy among her friends and neighbors. In the same way there is joy in heaven before the angels of God when one lost sinner is brought into the fold.

The “Lost Coin” is related to the “Hidden Treasure” in this way. The hidden treasure consists of a lost treasure of many coins representing lost sinners who still need to repent. The “Lost Coin” represents one lost sinner.

**What Next:** The parable of the “Two Lost Sons” or as more commonly known, “The Prodigal Son.”