



SNAPSHOTS OF THE KINGDOM Part V: A Visit to the Lost & Found

*Jeff Peabody
New Day Church
Federal Way, WA
May 8, 2005*

I'm glad to have the kids in with us for this special family Sunday on Mother's Day. We're talking about some of the parables that Jesus taught when he was on earth. Who can tell me what a parable is? A story is a parable with a point. Jesus told a lot of them to describe God's kingdom. We'll look at one of those stories in just a minute.

But before we get started, I have a couple things to return, if you don't mind. Almost every week here at New Day, somebody loses something or leaves it behind accidentally. Usually that means they end up in my car or my office, which is a scary thing, because it could get lost forever in either of those places. This morning I've got a Bible to return. Has anybody been missing a Bible? I've also got this nice pullover sweatshirt.

We've had people lose jewelry, camera tripods, clothing, papers, children...All kinds of things. Have you ever lost something that just made you feel sick when you realized it was missing?

This morning, we're going to meet a lady who lost something that was important to her in this short story Jesus told to some of his listeners.

Luke 15:8-10

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Now I know it's Mother's Day and that the Bible doesn't actually come out and SAY that this woman is a mom, but I'm guessing she probably is. Look at the evidence: She's good at finding things, she instinctively believes cleaning will help solve the problem, she likes calling her friends and she knows exactly how much money she has to work with at all times. That sounds like a mom to me.

Have you ever heard of something called a Leatherman? It's a tool that will fit in your pocket, but it's loaded with all kinds of useful equipment. It has pliers and scissors and knives and screwdrivers all crammed into this space of about 3 or 4 inches long.

Our story this morning is pretty small as far as parables go. But Jesus packed a lot of information into a little bit of space. He tells us some really great things about God. Because this story is a mini-metaphor. It's not really about a woman and her loose change – it's about God and his relationship with us.

Like any good story, this one has a beginning, a middle and an end. So let's walk through it a little more slowly.

First – the beginning. I call this

The Loss

The woman in this story had 10 coins called drachmas. They didn't represent a huge amount of money, but they were worth more than our change today. Each drachma was roughly the amount that one man could earn in a full day's work. Women had a harder time earning money than men, so this probably represented a lifetime of scrapping and saving.

Women also often had coins that were part of their dowry when they got married. A woman's parents would send money along with her as a gift to the new husband. Often the women would have these coins in a decorative headdress they would wear at their wedding.

If so, then this coin may have had additional meaning to her. A drachma might not buy very much, but it would represent something that couldn't be replaced.

A few months back, Derek lost his Bible.

[Interview with Derek]

It wasn't so much that Derek's Bible was worth a lot of money, although Bibles aren't cheap. He could probably buy a newer Bible that had more special features, a nicer cover, fewer wrinkled pages. But that Bible was valuable to him because it was his. He had his notes in it, he knew his way around it and had a history with it.

In talking about the loss this woman experienced, Jesus was communicating something to us about how God views us. And the first thing it says is that

God thinks you're valuable.

Stop and think about that for a minute. Jesus used a parable about money to describe how God thinks about us. Money has value. He thinks we have worth. If people have ever told you you're worthless or won't amount to anything, they're not speaking for God. God looks at us and considers us some of his prized possessions.

Not only that, he values us each individually. The woman cared about not just her coin collection, but also that one single coin that got lost. God cares about you and me on a personal level, not just as a collective group.

So why does he care? Why did that lady care? Her drachma may not have been able to buy all that much, and from the world's perspective, we may not be able to do that much. The reason we're valuable to God isn't because we're particularly talented or smart. Look at what Paul said to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 1:26-28

Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies"?

Jesus was criticized by the religious leaders for hanging out with a tough crowd. They couldn't understand why Jesus would have anything to do with these people who were so far from being perfect. But they were exactly the kind of people Jesus came to help, the kind that he still is looking to help.

We're valuable to God, but the value comes in the fact that we're his, not that we're any better than anybody else. It's like Derek's Bible. God loves us because we're his and he wants to love us.

So at some point along the way, one of the ten coins becomes lost and separated from the other nine. Of course, that's talking about us when we're not living in connection with God. We get off track.

I used to not like the idea of calling people "lost" when they don't have a relationship with God. It seemed a little bit of a put down or an insult. But this story gives the word a different perspective for me.

I've always thought of lost from the perspective of the coin. "I'm lost. I can't find my way. I'm in the dark. I'm not sure what I'm doing or where I am."

But this story looks at the coin being lost from how it affect the woman. It was her loss. She was the one who was grieved and upset by it. She was the one who felt the empty space left by the missing coin, who worried about where it might be.

When we talk about people being lost, we can think about it from God's sense of loss. God is perfect and complete in himself and doesn't need us, but it does in some way cause him grief and pain when we are out of relationship with him. Lost isn't just a way of describing sinners – lost is the person God is missing.

The story moves on from the initial loss to the next section, which is

The Search

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?

Once she realizes that a coin is missing, the woman springs into action. She drops whatever she is doing and goes right to work looking for it.

Stephanie and Christine Parks just took a trip to Mexico a few weeks back. While they were there, Stephanie lost her purse.

[Interview with Stephanie]

They say that in cases when a person is reported missing, the first 48 hours are critical. The longer you wait, the less chance there is that the person will be found.

When something or someone important to you is missing, you WANT to get looking right away. The woman didn't have to be prompted to search – it was her desire to find what mattered.

And that's something we can count on about God: **God wants you back.** And he is committed to doing everything he can to reach us.

Ezekiel 34:16

I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.

I like that verse because there's no question about the outcome. He WILL search and he WILL find us and he WILL fix what's broken. He takes the search very seriously.

So did that woman. Jesus said she lit a lamp, she swept the floor and she searched carefully. Lighting a lamp would have been a very important thing to do, because back when Jesus was on earth, houses were a lot different than they are today. For one thing, they were smaller. They had no electricity, and do you know what else? They had no windows! The doors weren't usually very big either, so it would have been very difficult to see without that lamp, even during the day.

Have you ever seen search and rescue teams with those lights on their hats? One of the most basic needs for a search is light. It's tough to find anything in the dark.

That's why God sent Jesus – to shine some light on our situation.

John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Thanks to Jesus, we can see the path. We don't have to be lost anymore. He gives us a way back to God that we couldn't see otherwise. That's the nature of light.

Have you ever gotten up in the night when it's totally dark and stepped on something or tripped over it on your way to the door? If you had just been able to switch on a light, you could have seen what was in your path.

Because light not only finds us – it shows us what's in our path. It's very exposing.

Ephesians 5:13-14

But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

*"Wake up, O sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*

Sometimes in God's search for us, when the light of Christ shines on us, it shows us things we hadn't really wanted to see about ourselves. Sometimes we're not so sure we want to be found, because all of a sudden we can see what needs to change.

When the woman in our story had lit a lamp, she started sweeping. Again, her house wasn't much like yours or mine. The floor would have been dirt and the broom was probably made of branches tied together. The coin could easily get buried by all the dirt and trampled into the ground.

All the stuff that God's light exposes in our lives is like that dirt floor. It can bury us. We can become covered by the dust of sin. So God takes his broom and deals with the dirt.

Isaiah 44:22

*I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,
your sins like the morning mist.
Return to me, for I have redeemed you.*

If Jesus was just light that showed us how bad we were, that wouldn't be very helpful. But he's the light that takes away the darkness. He's the broom that sweeps us clean.

If you feel far away from God this morning because of the things you've done or because of something that is between you and him, you can know that God still sees you, that he can take care of the dirt, and that he wants you back.

The last part of the story is a really happy ending.

The Party

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

This woman is so happy that she has to share her joy. She calls over everybody she knows who would appreciate the news. Interestingly, the word used for her friends is feminine, and I think that's because women generally give better reactions to this kind of news. If she called her husband, he'd probably say, "I'm glad dear. Next time be a little more careful where you keep that coin." So she calls her girlfriends instead, people who will enter into her celebration and who can feel the emotions with her.

There is nothing that quite compares with getting back something you thought you had lost forever. It's like double the happiness. Not only do you have everything you appreciated about what you lost in the first place. You also have this overwhelming sense of relief that makes the joy even greater. Any parent who has ever momentarily lost a child in a store or park can relate to that feeling.

There haven't been many happy stories to come out of the tsunami disaster. But the man on the screen had one. For four weeks after the waves hit, Mustafa Kamal searched refugee camps for his five year old daughter Rina Augustina. Finally someone told him they had seen her name posted on a list of children, and when he saw it he screamed with joy. Finally, when he saw her again he was overwhelmed with emotion, falling to his knees he cried out his daughter's name over and over. "I knew you were alive! I knew it!" Then he said to her, "My precious little one, I did not give up. I kept looking."

That is at the emotion at the heart of what Jesus wanted to communicate to us through this story.

God celebrates you.

God searches for us and is overjoyed when we're reunited with him. And he tells us, "My precious little one, I did not give up. I kept looking."

I read a quote in a book this week that says, "Recovering causes boundless joy." We cannot even comprehend the intensity of the love our God has for us, and how overjoyed he is to be back in relationship with us.

Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is with you,

he is mighty to save.

He will take great delight in you,

he will quiet you with his love,

he will rejoice over you with singing.

God takes great pleasure in saying to you and me, “There you are. I’m so glad I’ve found you. Your sins are forgiven. Come home.”

And because that is such a joy to God, he wants other people to celebrate with him. Just like that woman who found her coin called all her friends, God invites us to the party. He’s looking for people who share a similar heart and who will care about helping lost people become found.

We say that one of our values as a church is that New Day is a mission outpost. We’re here to be part of the search party, looking for any place we can shine the light of Christ. Then we’ll have the chance to share in the excitement when God finds somebody and brings them back to himself.

One of the ways we’re trying that is with our summer outreach. We’re throwing a huge music in the park party down at the Lighthouse Park on July 16th. It’s a really big undertaking that will take a lot of time and money and coordination to do it. For what? It’s an attempt to make connections with the community, to put our energies where we say our heart is, which is in reaching people with the good news about Jesus. There’s a whole lot of floor to sweep in NE Tacoma, and it may seem to some like effort that could be better spent elsewhere. But we do it for the chance that we could impact even one life, because that’s where God’s heart is. Wouldn’t it be great to be the kind of church that invests its resources not just on ourselves but on God’s efforts to track down those people who are hurting and lonely and missing out on a relationship with him.

God sees you as valuable. He wants you back, and he celebrates you. Those are three truths that Jesus wanted us to grasp about God. As you think about them, they each have two different applications to consider.

First, do I believe God values me, and that he does so just because I’m his? Does it change the way I see myself? And if I really believe God values other people, how does that change how I treat them?

Do I need light or a broom? Am I still feeling in the dark, like I’m waiting and I can’t see my way, or am I just needing God to sweep out the bad stuff in my life? Do I need to be found? And, if God makes it a priority to win people back, how am I doing at seeking people out myself? If something goes wrong between me and someone else, do I pursue the relationship or let it die? Do I follow God’s pattern of being intentional in my search?

Finally, do I know God enjoys me? Jesus said there’s a big party in heaven when somebody turns away from sin. Am I needing to turn away from anything? And if that is where God finds joy, am I finding joy in seeing other people come to Christ?

One little coin was worth a lot of effort and ended up being the source of a lot of joy. God sees us as worth way more than that coin, and he won’t stop pursuing us until he has the joy of having us back in his arms.