

“People”

02-28-16

Let's start off the message today with the very first point: **People Matter to God!** The creator of the world sees people, out of all that He created as the crown of His creation. When He created them, He made them just like Him! Perfect! Nothing else that was created had that distinction! We're something special to Him!

Last week we heard about PURPOSE—God's purpose is in the person of Jesus Christ, seeking and saving the lost. The good news? **There Are NO Exclusions!** Jesus came down to earth to save. **Jesus Died For All!** John 3:16 says it so well, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* Sinners, tax collectors, scribes, Pharisees, outsiders, and insiders. **All Are Welcome at the Table of God!** What matters most to God, is PEOPLE!

In the days before smartphones, MapQuest, GPS and other kinds of directional aids, a very prominent and hardworking businessman was driving to an important meeting. It just so happened that he was not only running late, but was lost! Spotting a little boy at the side of the road, he stopped and asked the little boy very impatiently, *“Son, which way is it to Dover?”* *“I don't know,”* was the boy's reply.

“Do you know the way to the main road?” *“Don't know that either,”* said the little boy. *“Well, you don't seem to know much, do you, son?”* said the frustrated businessman. *“No, I don't, but I know I ain't lost!”* shrugged the boy.

Turn to Luke 15, page 874. Jesus teaches us many times about the joy God experiences when what is lost becomes found. We all know how it feels to be lost, disoriented, confused or wandering. Whether it's uncertainty about one's future, health issues, financial woes, or the challenges of relationships, there's no smartphone that can provide a quick fix. Advertisers try to entice us with *“relief”* so we'll have the kind of happiness that changes lives, but as we read in Ecclesiastes, *“it is like chasing after the wind.”*

Jesus, the master storyteller, used stories and images to convey profound theological concepts about how much people matter to God. On His story canvas, Jesus first paints a picture of a shepherd seeking a lost sheep. **Verses 4-7,** *“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? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 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.’ 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.”*

William Barclay provides a helpful background about Jesus and lost sheep. *“If one was to try to bring ‘reason’ to this parable, human judgment would label this foolishness. To leave 99 sheep in order to seek and save the one that is lost is bad business and irresponsible. But to look at it through the lens of faith, could this parable provide a picture of the love of God that is willing to risk everything (even death on a cross) until God finds it?! If people truly matter to God, this story illustrates the relentless pursuit of God who has come to seek and save the lost.”*

Like a sheep, we've been so busy nibbling on the grass, that as we lift up our heads, we realize the fact that we're lost! **We are Lost Sheep!** As it's sung in Handel's Messiah, "*All we like sheep have gone astray.*" **We've gone astray** and we have no idea where we are. But it seems to be harmless, so **We Rationalize** how we got there or **We Make Excuses**. It's someone else's fault, not ours!

Perhaps this is the most dangerous way we become lost. We don't even recognize it! We hide our thoughts in phrases like, "*I'm spiritual but not religious.*" Or "*I Don't really go to church because the church is full of hypocrites.*" And by the way, that statement is true. We are hypocrites, but we're forgiven!

We worship a relentless God. **But Jesus Offers His Radical Grace** and never stops pursuing! As David wrote in Psalm 23, "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*". Jesus, our Good Shepherd **Cares So Deeply and is So Committed**. Jesus wants a relationship with us, and He won't be satisfied until He draws everyone to Himself! This is how much people matter to God!

Following the same path after telling about lost sheep, Jesus tells about a woman who loses one of her silver coins and desperately looks under every nook and cranny of her house to find it. **Verses 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? 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.'* Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The coin itself was worth about ten days of earnings. Like the image of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, this story gives a similar picture of desperation and relentlessness as the woman searches for the lost coin.

Can't we all identify with this woman's frantic search when something of great value is missing? But don't miss the moment! When she finds the missing coin, a sigh of relief isn't where she stops, she decides to throw a party! A Celebration! Joy! Fellowship! The shepherd does the same thing! These all bear witness to a God that rejoices when one who is lost is found!

Joy is the emotional hooray of God, the sound of the applause of heaven! Perhaps the real scandal of this story in Luke is that we like to put God in our little box, and only pull Him out for special occasions! But these stories offer us a glimpse of a God that intrudes and disrupts our lives with His continual presence.

God is bigger than our attempts to limit the extent of His extravagant grace. His love is without limits for people. When we look into the mirror of our lives, that should inspire us to say "*Thank You Father*" and dance with joy!

To all you who are feeling lost and searching for joy, the God of joy and life has already found you and has made His decision about your life with a resounding "YES!" You can stop running away and begin running into the arms of Jesus your Savior!

People—You Matter to God! **You're Not Only Found, but Loved!** That's what living Lent as a person of the resurrection is all about. You need to reach out to the people that God has created around you. They're people who need to see and hear about Jesus Christ from hearing and listening to you about how Jesus loves all!