

What Does It Mean to Be Lost?
Luke 19:1-10; Luke 15

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Text Introduction: Industry has its special words. Sports have its special words. The age of text messaging has created a lingo all its own. We should not be surprised that as Christians we have our own vocabulary. At times that hinders our effectiveness because non-Christians do not understand our special words. It is as though we speak in some kind of code language. As I see it, we have a choice. One is to not use this language. The problem is that some of those words are such good words—words if explained could help us share the special message of Christ. So, instead of discarding the words, we might be better off from time to time to explain the words. I want to do that with one of those words today—the word “lost.” Lost is a good word because it is a word that that Scripture uses to describe the very purpose of Jesus’ coming.

Text: ¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. ⁴ So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since He was about to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, because today I must stay at your house."

⁶ So he quickly came down and welcomed Him joyfully. ⁷ All who saw it began to complain, "He's gone to lodge with a sinful man!"

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much!"

⁹ "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

Introductory Statement: What did Jesus mean when He said that He has come to seek and to save the lost?

Four Kinds of Lost Persons:

Thinking about what it means to be physically lost can be helpful in understanding what it means to be spiritually lost. Here are some of my stories about being lost.

1. Lost in Albertsons

The very first time I ever remember being lost was at Albertsons. I couldn't have been more than about 5 years old, but I still remember the panic of being separated from my mother. To a 5 year old, the grocery store seemed as large as the ocean. I ventured too far away and I was lost. I had no idea what to do, so that day I learned something about being lost.

A person can be lost and not know what to do.

This is the problem of the young son in the parable of Luke 15. In a foreign land, he is helpless. He has squandered everything. He feels hopeless. He thought he could handle everything on his own, but now he is helpless. I think that spiritually describes a lot of people.

2. Lost in San Antonio

I think my most embarrassing experience of being lost happened on a trip to San Antonio for our fourth wedding anniversary. I had been to San Antonio before so that made me (at least in my mind) the expert on San Antonio. Linett and I were walking down the River Walk—a tourist area of San Antonio that I remembered to be a circle. Therefore, in my mind, I believed that so long as we kept walking, we would eventually wind up at the same exact spot where we started. The hour grew later and the walkers became more sparse and the questioning became more frequent—“You sure?” Only when we got completely apart from every other human did I have to confess, “I think we need to turn around.” I learned something about being lost that day. (Come to think of it, I learned a lot about a lot of stuff that day.)

A person can be lost, know what to do, but not do it.

The Bible tells of a rich man who posed a question to Jesus. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” After some conversation in which the man touts his goodness, Jesus tells the rich man, “You still lack one thing: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” This complicated saying in its context reveals that the man was unwilling to relinquish all to follow Christ. In fact, the story comes to a mysterious sudden ending by concluding, “After he heard this, he became extremely sad, because he was very rich.” In other words, unwilling to trust completely in Christ, even after hearing what to do, he walked away from the call of Christ upon his life.

3. Lost Going to a Funeral

An equally embarrassing time of being lost occurred to me a few years ago. I was to conduct graveside funeral services for a church member in her hometown of Singer, LA. I was given a set of directions and headed off to the cemetery in plenty of time with a friend of mine. As we travelled, my friend and I got to talking, not paying a whole lot of attention to the route except to be looking for the one road marker that our directions told us to take. We never realized we had missed our turn until we arrived at the next major town on the highway—some 14 miles beyond our appointed road we were to take. To make a long and painful story short, I was quite late, and to top all things off the 90+ degree July afternoon had suddenly turned in to a powerful South Louisiana thunderstorm, leaving the 100 or so guests assembled for the funeral hot, wet, and fairly agitated with this preacher. I learned something that day about being lost.

A person can be lost and not know it.

I think this description fits Zacchaeus who seeks to meet Jesus as described in Luke 19.

4. Lost as a Driver's Education Student

One more story about my being lost. When I was in High School most everybody took Driver's Education during the summer while in High School. My driving instructor's method of teaching was to start yelling at you the very moment that you sat down in the car and continue yelling until you got out of the car. As a result, I drove in great fear of his next tirade. On this particular day, driving on some back road, he became so frustrated he simply yelled for me to just drive on back to school. This posed a problem because I did not know where we were. But, too timid to admit my lack of knowledge and too fearful that this might bring on another yelling tirade, I decided to guess my way back to school. Turn by turn, I guessed hoping to find some familiar landmark. Turn by turn, I would later find out brought me farther and farther away from my destination. I learned something that day about being lost.

A person can be lost and deny it.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day fit this kind of lost person. Many today are spiritually lost---turn by turn trying to find their way—only to move farther and farther away from God's truth.

Spiritual Truths about Lostness:

Here is why the word "lost" is a good word.

Being lost indicates being separated from God.

Luke 15, in many ways, is the heart of the Gospel of Luke. The content of Luke 15 is three parables—the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost son. The three parables in Luke 15 should be read as one unit. Each of the three parables builds on the other. The context of the parables is the grumbling of the Pharisees in 15:2. The common denominator in the three parables is the joy associated with finding something of value that is lost. Jesus used these three parables as a progression. In the first two parables (a lost sheep and a lost coin), Jesus established that celebration occurs when a lost object of value is found. The third and final parable advances the truth because the lost object is a person. The first two parables really set-up the third parable. In each case, something of value is lost.

To God, every person is a person of value. Being lost indicates being separated from God.

Being lost indicates being searched for by God.

In the first two parables of Luke 15 searching is done to find the lost object. In the last, searching turns to constant looking for the father sees the son from a distance. Though the father does not go in search, he never gives up his watching for the return.

From these three parables we learn something about God's searching for us.

- Every person is worthy of receiving the Gospel.
- Some people require extreme measures to be found.
- Some people have to be patiently waited for.
- Rejoicing takes place.

Being lost indicates the hope of being found.

Finally, the word “lost” is a good word because it indicates the hope of being found. This is what Jesus came to do—to seek and to save. You might not know it, but God is searching for the lost today. To the Christian, take heart, He is not done searching for that loved one of yours. To the person here today that feels kind of “lost,” He is searching for you today.

The one common denominator in all of my stories of lostness is that eventually I was found. I became “un-lost.” But in every case, I had to do something—I had to admit that I was lost.