

Lost and Found

In Luke 15, Jesus tells two short but powerful parables – the lost sheep and the lost coin. Both describe something precious that has been lost and then found. A shepherd leaves the 99 to search for the one. A woman sweeps her whole house until she recovers her coin. And when they find what was lost, there is great rejoicing.

Jesus tells these stories because God cares deeply for the lost. The Pharisees were grumbling about Jesus welcoming sinners, but Jesus reminds them – and us – that Heaven celebrates whenever one sinner repents. That's good news, because each of us has been lost in sin. And when we were lost, God came searching for us. Psalm 14 gives us a reality check regarding the fallen nature of humanity, and also points us to the only hope we have – Jesus Christ!

The Fool Denies God

David, the writer of Psalm 14, opens with the statement, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God,’” (Ps. 14:1a). The fool he’s talking about here isn’t just some random dummy off the street. In Biblical language, a fool is someone who denies God in practice. A person who chooses to live as though God does not exist.

We see this all over today. There are people who openly deny God’s existence. Others may confess with their lips that God is real – but in their hearts and actions – they functionally live as atheists. They live for themselves. They ignore God’s Word. And they refuse to submit to Him.

David tells us that denying God is not wisdom. It’s folly. Denying the God who created us, sustains us, and loves us leaves us hopelessly adrift. Without God, there is no ultimate standard of goodness and righteousness. Without Him, there’s no foundation for meaning, no purpose for living, no anchor for hope.

Corrupt Humanity

The psalmist continues:

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one, (verses 1b-3).

Friends, this is world-wide condemnation. Every human heart has been corrupted and spoiled by sin. Paul quotes this passage in Romans 3:22-23, when he writes, “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We’re messed up, and without Jesus – without God – we stay messed up.

People don't like hearing this. The truth is a bitter pill to swallow. We'd like to think that deep down, people are basically good. Time and time again, the Scriptures show us the opposite. Deep down, apart from God, people are broken.

Sin infects our thoughts, words, and deeds. It ruins and distorts even our best intentions. Left to ourselves, we're the lost sheep, the missing coin. We're wandering around blind and in the dark, unable to save ourselves. That's bad news for us – for all humanity – but it makes the Good News of the grace of God revealed to us through Jesus Christ shine even brighter!

God Sees Us

I want to back up just a second and point something out. The psalmist tells us, "The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God," (Ps. 14:2). God sees everything. He examines humanity, and searches for those who seek Him.

What does this psalm say He finds? "Do all these evildoers know nothing? They devour My people as though eating bread; they never call on the Lord," (verse 4). He finds a people who have turned away, who "devour" others – exploiting, oppressing, and ignoring God and God's Word. Try as they might, people cannot hide from God. We may fool others, but we'll never be able to fool Him.

He sees our hearts clearly. And in His searching, God isn't looking just to condemn us – He's looking for those of us who will respond to His call. He's looking for those who will return to Him. This is why Jesus came. He is the Good Shepherd who searches for the lost sheep. The woman searching for the lost coin – it's a story that represents the lengths Jesus will go to, to find us. Jesus Christ is the One who came to seek and to save that which is lost.

Dread of the Godless

"But there they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous," (verse 5). For they who deny God, the psalmist writes, dread – terror – will come. One day they will stand before the God they rejected, and that will be a terrible day for them. But for the righteous – we who have placed our hope in Jesus Christ – there is comfort. God IS with us! Notice what David tells us next. "You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge," (verse 6). Even the weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable who put their trust in God have Him as their refuge. While the world may despise them, God upholds them.

Friends, this is where ministries like the Gideons International step into the story. Their mission is simple but invaluable – to place God's Word into the hands of people all over the world. Why do they do that? And why do we partner with them? I'll tell you. It's through the Holy Scriptures that the lost hear God's voice. We've heard the stories before where people have found God on the pages of a Bible left by the Gideons in a hotel room, the sidewalk in front of a high school or a university, or while they're laying in a hospital bed. They're down and out, they see a Gideon Bible laying there, pick it

up, start reading and find that the Lord IS their refuge. That He loves them! And they turn their lives over to Jesus Christ.

We partner with them because you and I don't have the resources to travel all over the place, to print Bibles, and spread them far and wide around the globe. But the Gideons do. One of my favorite stories is about the man who's down and out, in the hotel room, ready to end his life. But there in the nightstand, he finds a Gideon Bible. He reads it, and the Word turns his life around. What was once hopeless became filled with hope. That's the power of the Word of God. It takes the fool who says, "There is no God," and opens his eyes to see that the Lord really is his refuge! Of course, that also goes for the ladies, too. I'm sure there are stories out there of women who were in bad circumstances, finding a Bible placed by the Gideons, and then realizing that God had come as their Deliverer, too.

Our Hope Is In the Lord

"Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!" (verse 7). David closes with a cry for salvation. He longed for God's deliverance to come. For Israel, that hope looked forward to the coming Messiah. For us, that hope has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, salvation has come out of Zion. Through Him, God has restored His people. In Him, the lost are found, the sinner is forgiven, and the dead are raised to life! This is why, even though Psalm 14 paints such a dark and disturbing picture of human sin, it closes with joy. Psalm 14 reminds us of humanity's deep corruption, but also of God's salvation of us. Our hope is not in ourselves. Our world is broken. But our hope is not in the world, friends. Our hope is in the Lord. I'm glad that we partner with the Gideons. When we share God's Word, we participate in the rejoicing of Heaven. What was lost has been found!

Prayer: Gracious God, Thank You that though we were lost, You searched for us through Jesus Christ. Thank You for being our refuge, our strength, and our salvation. Help us to trust You more deeply, to live in the joy of Your salvation, and to share Your Word with others so that the whole world would know the hope that is found only in You. In the strong Name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.