

MAR 30, 2025

# Marion weekly update

*SERMON March 23- "Seek, Find, Cherish" Luke 15:8-10, Matthew 13:44-45*

This week we are again looking at two parables. They are short, but carry a good punch to them. The first is the parable of the lost coin. A woman has ten silver coins and loses one. She tears the house apart to find it and celebrates when she does. Jesus compares this to a person who is "lost" being found.

This story comes right after the story of the lost sheep. The shepherd leaves the larger flock to find the one that has wandered off and celebrates when he finds it and it returns.

The parable of the lost coin is where we find the familiar passage the all of heaven celebrates when one sinner turns to repentance.

The message is very simple. We are all God's children and of great value to God. Those who haven't found their way to God are so loved that God will eagerly search for them, desiring to bring them into connection with God and with the others who have found their way.

There is a lot of encouragement here. One of the questions we might ask ourselves is whether we find those who are lost as valuable and cherished as God does. How far are we willing to go to find them and bring them back? Far more valuable than a coin or a sheep is certainly a human soul.

The amount of celebrating that happens in heaven I think is often undersold. It happens an awful lot. I've heard this parable of the coin often used only to describe people who come to faith in Christ. That is when the celebration happens. But this isn't what the parable says.

It says when a sinner comes to repentance. Repentance is simply turning from what we're thinking/believing/or doing that isn't in line with God's desires and design to what is in God's desire and design. The kind of repentance we speak of in terms of believing in the redeeming work of the cross isn't here because Jesus is teaching this well before the cross ever happens.

This is about simple repentance.

Repentance can happen whether we have the vocabulary to explain it or not. If we believe that the Holy Spirit is speaking to every person, drawing them to God, then certainly there are people who feel the Spirit in the heart but don't have the words to describe it. They can respond to that Spirit and change whatever the Spirit is calling them to change.

In this, while they may not have come to the same faith in Christ that we have, nevertheless they are still closer to God. They have listened and responded to the Spirit in their hearts. This is repentance. And according to this, heaven celebrates.

In truth, even those who come to faith in Jesus find repentance over and over again. All of us are on a regular search for God. We seek purpose, grace, and the voice of the Spirit to get us more on track with God. We have a clearer idea of what to shoot for when we have seen Jesus as Lord. We are striving to be like Him.

In that striving we find over and over places where we aren't quite right with God. If we are disciples, when this happens we change. We repent. And heaven celebrates because we have become that much closer to God.

This leads us to the second parable about the hidden treasure. In both examples, someone finds the grandest treasure they can imagine. When they discover it, they give up all they have to buy the property where they found it so that they can possess the treasure itself. The treasure is likened to the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is the greatest treasure we can find. It is both a location and a condition. As a location it is where we all hope to one day be eternally. As a condition it is a state of the heart, mind, and spirit that is complete. It is in the fullest keeping with God's desires, which means all of the perfection of the Kingdom of God, the location which is in God's direct presence, exists inside of us. The hope is that we then pour that condition out to the world around us intending to influence the world to become like that Kingdom.

A couple things come to mind about finding the Kingdom of God that go beyond the parable. The parable is more about the value than the process of attaining the Kingdom. In the parable the treasure is material and attained in a one and done purchase. The Kingdom is different.

In the parable, the ones purchasing the treasure have an opportunity to regain all they had spent on the property. They can go back to work and keep making their money back. We don't do that when we are acquiring the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is also about giving up and sacrifice. We give up attitudes and values. We give up beliefs that aren't correct about God. We give up actions and words that don't fall into line with God's desires for us and the world. We give up any part of ourselves that is out of step with Christ.

And we don't seek to get them back.

This can be a real temptation. If I am dishonest in my job because it makes my payday bigger what do I do to attain the Kingdom? I become truthful. After a time do I go back to lying again? No. But every time I think about how my material gain might not be what it once was because I've stopped being dishonest with clients the temptation might be there to go back to my old ways.

A friend of mine talked about sin that we give up being thrown into a lake of forgetfulness by God that has a "no fishing" sign. Unfortunately sometimes we head to that lake with a rod and reel looking for what's been thrown in there.

The goal is that when what is contrary to God is done and gone, we keep it that way. We find the Kingdom and hold on for dear life.

The Kingdom also doesn't all happen at once. It would be nice to make one decision and reach perfection. Sadly that's not the case. Throughout a lifetime we search ourselves, allowing the Spirit to guide us, for how to become more like Christ. A little at a time we find what is crooked and make it straight. We find what is broken and with the help of God allow it to heal.

The truth of the matter is that most people are seeking the Kingdom of God even if they don't call it that. The Kingdom is completeness. I think most people want the peace, purpose, content, assurance, and joy that comes from having a life that is lived without having that sense of conscience pinging at us that something is wrong. We want to know that whatever our lot in the eyes of the world, we know that the life we are living is solid, true, and leaving its best mark.

It's a desire for the same condition of the heart even if we disagree on how to describe it. Finding ways to connect in this common search until we find common language is one of the great challenges in such a divided world. But that's a different message for a different Sunday.

For today, I'd like to suggest something that will help us all find those pieces that are out of step with God. Then when we find them we sacrifice them for the sake of the Kingdom. And when that happens all of heaven rejoices.

Jesus often removed by Himself away from the rest of the disciples. He removed from the distractions around Him. One of the things He did was pray, however I would suggest that scripture also calls us to "be still" and to meditate. Finding God and God's voice requires us to find undistracted stillness.

That means shutting off the TV, silencing the phone, shutting the laptop, putting aside the book, and finding time and place away from people who would take our attention. It means sitting in our own selves, our thoughts, and our feelings and paying attention to what is going on.

Even Bible study and prayer can be distractions. Yes, we hear God in prayer and study and those are important disciplines to engage in. But when I'm studying or praying I'm still distracted. I'm looking somewhere other than deep inside myself.

To find what's off inside me I have to feel my own brokenness. I have to acknowledge my own resentment, anger, sorrow, confusion, fear, bitterness, and whatever else may be indicating that something inside of me hasn't been dealt with. The Kingdom of God is peace and content, so whatever in me is storming and discontent is an indicator that I have work to do with God to find out what I need to change or do.

This is uncomfortable and hard. Distraction and busyness is attractive because I can avoid this

work. It makes it easier to just blame whatever discontent I have on someone else. If only this situation changed or this person changed I'd be fine.

Heaven forbid I admit the issue might be me.

The harsh reality is that even if the situation changes or the person I'm upset with changes whatever is wrong in me won't change. It might ease for a moment, but when I re-encounter the same situation or a person that reminds me of the one I was upset with all of it comes rushing back.

The statement "wherever you go there you are" is cliché but true. I bring me and all my good and bad to every situation and relationship. If what is broken in me isn't healed I never really change.

When I worked in Baltimore we went through Assistant Executive Directors like crazy. Those of us who were there for a while adopted a sense that we could deal with whatever because it wouldn't be long before whomever was gone and someone else taking their place.

A friend I worked with had a real hard time with one in particular. One day he shared something that took his faith and professional lives, mashed them together, and put a light bulb on. He said this, "I realized that I need to stop praying for God to change him and start praying for God to change me."

This director might never change. God could speak to his heart all day long and he could ignore it. We could also have been wrong about what we thought needed to change. Maybe we were the ones who were off base. Regardless, the only pathway to a true peace of heart and mind was to figure out why the aggravation was happening. What did we still need to work through ourselves to find a place of a Kingdom heart in that circumstance?

Taking this time. Listening for the Holy Spirit. Doing the work to handle what is apart from God inside of us is the only real road to finding the Kingdom of God within us.

It's hard work. We have to admit we're not perfect. We have to admit we are wrong. We have to confront painful things that have happened to us in the past. We have to confront painful things that we have done to others. We have to come face to face with the dark side of who we are.

Then we change it. With the help of God we do the work to heal, to carve out beliefs, attitudes, and actions that go against the Kingdom of God.

We give up everything for the sake of the Kingdom. A little at a time we claim and reclaim that peace, love, and assurance that only comes from being in genuine right standing before God.

The beauty is that as we do this our lives just get better and better. They get better because we're not depending on the material trappings around us. We are relying more and more on the things that really count in God's sight. We are building complete lives hand in hand with God.

Day by day we draw closer to God. Day by day heaven celebrates as we do. The world changes with us and the more of us journey towards the genuine Kingdom of God the more the world changes into its likeness. Which means we have a lot of work to do given the state of the world.

In the end living each day securing the Kingdom in our hearts a little at a time leads us where we all want to one day be. The condition of the Kingdom in our hearts leads us to the Kingdom location to dwell with God. Then we get to see the celebration when we make our way home and join the celebration each time one more sinner comes to find their own little piece of the Kingdom one day at a time.

## BIBLE STUDY 2 Samuel 16

As David is fleeing the city he runs into Ziba. This is the servant of Saul who was given charge over Jonathan's son Mephibosheth's land while Mephibosheth was being cared for in Jerusalem by David. David had given his word to his best friend Jonathan that no harm would befall Jonathan's family when David rose to power. He was keeping this oath.

What we are seeing here is an intentional show by the writer is the first of two very different present opinions about David. Ziba is trying to gain favor. He butters David up with a bunch of provisions.

When David asks about Mephibosheth, Ziba says that in the present turmoil over the throne he is just biding his time and waiting for the throne to be returned to Saul's line. In other words, he's waiting to be made king.

David immediately turns all of Mephibosheth's land over to Ziba. Ziba blesses David as David continues on his way.

There is a question at this moment. Was Ziba telling the truth? There is no sense that Mephibosheth had this interest. Still, David turns over the land. In a moment of reaction all of that property becomes Ziba's. Ziba was favorable to David, but was it because he thought he could get something from him?

We don't know for sure, but the situation shows that there are some who are still favoring David. It also might signal that there are plenty of opportunists afoot. There was no way for David to confirm Ziba's story at this point. He was on the run and had much more pressing matters. In the moment he rewards Ziba for his information and moves along.

This is a good cautionary tale in the midst of the drama. Today we have lots of means to check out stories fairly well in the moment. When we hear something, take it as gospel, and make choices on those assumptions we can be very liable to bad decisions that have reaching consequences. Taking the time to confirm accusations spares so much pain and unnecessary damage. It gives us the ability to make clear headed decisions based in reality and truth. Rumors can be poison to anything and anyone seeking for the genuine best results.

As David and his entourage move on we see the second scene that paints another picture of David's image. If Ziba is favorable, Shimei is wildly not.

Shimei is from Saul's tribe, Benjamin. He is still bitter that one of his tribesman has been stripped of kingship and is now dead. Clearly he blames David. Shimei throws rocks and dirt at David as he screams vile curses David's way.

As we saw in chapter 15, the David of old is back. He isn't hot headed. He isn't vengeful. He isn't prideful. In fact once again he stays Abishai's hand. Apparently Joab's family has quite a temper. Joab was the one who revenge killed Abner. Abishai wanted to kill Saul in his sleep when they came upon him in the night. There too David told him not to do it because Saul was God's "anointed." Here Abishai is again waved off.

Once again showing his reliance on God and God's judgment David simply attributes the possibility that God has inspired Shimei's curses. If so, who is David to be upset? He will accept God's judgment or good or bad whatever may come. He even seems to recognize that even if it's misguided, Shimei has reason to be upset with David. It's unlikely Shimei is aware of any of the drama that has been afoot with Saul and David. All he may know is that Saul is gone and replaced by someone outside of Saul's line.

From our standpoint, Shimei's behavior doesn't really track as inspired by the God revealed in Jesus. David doesn't have this reference point. What matters is that from his own perspective he is moved to consider his own past, his own relationship with God, and to allow both to cause mercy to be extended.

Once again, a good lesson is taught. When we take time to consider our own role in someone else's anger it can go a long way in mitigating our own offense. This helps us respond out of grace rather than returning anger for anger. In David's situation here it keeps him from engaging in some petty squabble when there is a much greater issue at hand with Absalom.

In the last portion of the chapter the subterfuge continues and we get a glimpse into Ahithophel. Skipping ahead a little, Ahithophel is seen on a prophetic level. Though only an advisor, his words are taken as if he were consulting God Himself for advice. This lends a lot of weight to what people might take from his counsel.

Ahithophel's reputation is all the more reason for Hushai to ingratiate himself to Absalom. He wheedles the modern equivalent of two truths and a lie. Absalom is rightly suspicious that his father's friend would turn sides so abruptly. Hushai's response is sufficient to allay those concerns.

"I'll serve the one the men of Israel have chosen (he believes the men have chosen David)" "I'll serve the one that is justly chosen by God and the people (again, he believes David to be this person)" Then comes the lie. "I will serve you, the son, just as I served the father."

This last one is a bold faced lie. The first two convince Absalom that Hushai has changed loyalties and so the lie is believed. Hushai is now in Absalom's ear to try and thwart the words of Ahithophel, the prophetic advisor.

Ahithophel gives the advice for Absalom to make a show of dominance to all Israel. It so happens that this is the fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy that David's wives will be taken openly as a consequence for what he did with Bathsheba in secret.

The suggestion is made for Absalom to bring the concubines David has left behind (concubines were often seen as a lesser form of wife). Then on the rooftop Absalom will sleep with all of them as a sign to all Israel that he has toppled David as king and taken possession of all he has.

This is a show of absolute disrespect to his father. It is also a show of power to demonstrate the authority he has seized as the self-proclaimed king. This is significant. Self-proclaimed over God-ordained makes a big difference.

The scene is dramatic and sets the stage for an inevitable showdown between father and son. David may be on the run but he's still alive. He's also still David. Absalom feels he's seized kingly power and is exercising it before Israel. Sadly it seems that there's only one thing left to happen. The one who is claiming new authority has to get rid of the one who as long as he's alive technically still has it.