

Relentless Love

✠ Seeks the stubborn lost (vv.1-7)

✠ Seeks the helpless lost (vv.8-10)

In the name of Jesus, the Friend of outcasts and sinners, dear fellow redeemed:

It's getting harder in America to define *love*. Hollywood doesn't have a clue. Our Supreme Court ruled against God's design for marriage. Sadly, God's people often prove that we don't have a clue what real *love* is either. Think of how deeply God loved His bride the Israelites. That was the old covenant He made with them at Mount Sinai. "If you obey me, *then* you will be my people." That worked about as well as marriages do when a husband says, "If my wife deserves it, *then* I will love her." Or a wife who says, "If my husband earns it, *then* I will respect him." Fact is, our human condition always trips up on that huge little word with only two letters, *IF*. Today's Old Testament lesson shows the **Relentless Love** the LORD had for his Israelites when he told the prophet Hosea to redeem his unfaithful wife and take her home again. **Relentless Love** is what Jesus was demonstrating to church people who thought they had everything they needed to please God – the Pharisees and experts in the law, but they didn't have a clue. Others who came with nothing, sure that God had every reason to be angry with them, the tax collectors and sinners – the **lost** ones, found mercy. With these two short parables in the "Lost and Found" chapter, Luke 15, Jesus is reaching out to all of us. Here is real *love*, God's **Relentless Love**, that...

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Back in the day when the Internet was young, when it was so exciting to watch a video on your computer, there was one about two young police officers in New Zealand. They were looking far across a park where you could see traffic moving, and also something rather small in the distance. They ran over to it, and then the camera shows a sheep on its back with its legs kicking in the air. This is what is known as a "cast" sheep. It didn't seem like that big a deal for them to roll the sheep over and hold her up for a minute until she got her equilibrium, and then let her run away. But then the two cops start dancing up and down and fist pumping and giving each other high fives. What a great thing they just did, eh?

Jesus is seeking to relate the self-righteous Pharisees and experts in the law to something that they knew a little about. So he asks them, "***Which of you, if you had 100 sheep and lost one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go out after the one that was lost until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!'***"

Most of us have never cared for sheep, but if we understand a little bit more about them we can appreciate Jesus' parable. A sheep that stays **lost** is a dead sheep, destroyed by predators, disease, parasites, or harsh weather. We too are sheep who love to wander, so much that the owner could just let us die as we deserve. Too often we Christians are like the sheep that thinks it has found the greatest spot to lie down and relax. Not realizing its rutted trail is dangerous to matted wool, heavy with filth. We roll back and forth, lazy in our soft, cozy spot. But suddenly our center of gravity shifts as the heavy wool of selfishness flips us over, making you a "cast" sheep. With its unprotected belly exposed just a few hours the blazing sun or freezing cold will kill the "cast" sheep. "***Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why so disquieted within me? Put your hope in God. For I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.***" (Psalm 42:11) "***We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***" (Isaiah 53:6 NIV84) We need the Good Shepherd's **Relentless Love** to rescue us from our **stubborn** passions and desires. Thank God for not giving up on any of us.

Did you notice one big difference between those two cops and the shepherd in Jesus' parable? The two officers set the sheep back on its legs and let it run off. But it's still in danger on its own. The good shepherd finds his sheep and puts it *on his shoulders*. He joyfully carries that sheep home. Everything the sheep now needs will be provided, including food and protection and affection. We truly have everything we need when **Relentless Love Seeks the stubborn lost** and takes us home with Jesus.

What we can't see is what Jesus reveals is happening up in heaven. *"I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent."* There are those who are safe with Jesus because they have already repented of their sins and are trusting in him for forgiveness. And then there are those we only think they're safe because they're self-righteous and feel no need for repentance. Jesus' point here is how God's **Relentless Love** keeps seeking and finding because they love party time up in heaven. Can we relate?

✠ Seeks the helpless lost (vv.8-10)

Relentless Love takes energy. Unfortunately, even Christian congregations can prove that we don't have the energy on our own. We can be like a state that requires only electric cars, but then fails to provide the power grid to juice them up. It doesn't matter if you have the right plug and cable, if the power keeps going out. That's a helpful way to picture what happened in the congregation at Corinth.

A man became unplugged from the congregation by committing sexual immorality with his father's wife. The congregation carried out loving discipline by warning him about unrepentant sin. By the time Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, the man had repented. He was sorry for his sin. But the sorrow of contrition can be deadly if the man cannot plug back into the power grid of God's grace. *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."* (2 Corinthians 7:10) What can often happen in congregations is what happened in Corinth. They were leaving the man hanging like dangling electric cord. So the Lord's Apostle Paul commands the congregation to energize **Relentless Love**. *"You should...forgive and comfort him, or else such a person could be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. For that reason, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him."* (2 Corinthians 2:7f EHV) Satan schemes to destroy every Christian's faith either like a **stubborn** sheep that loves to wander, or by **helpless** despair for one who's sorry and needs forgiveness.

The coin in Jesus' parable is absolutely **helpless**. Isn't it strange in this world that the more valuable a coin might be, the more likely it is to get **lost**? I don't know if you can blame that on Murphy's law, but it sure seems to be part of the frustration of this sin-cursed world. Be that as it may, God's **Relentless Love** will not be stopped. It's like the woman in Jesus' second parable who seems to have been fairly poor with only ten coins. All the more reason why she would not give up until she had lit the lamp, swept the house and searched carefully, relentlessly, until she found it. And then she calls up all the neighbors to come over and party down with her just because she found her lost coin? Is that for real?

Here's where you really have to pay attention to the last verse Jesus speaks to us today: *"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* This time Jesus is not just talking about joy in heaven. Here He says, *"joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* If there's joy in the *presence of the angels*, who is rejoicing? It's God! God rejoices when you are absolutely sure you have nothing in your hand to bring and can only cling to the cross of Jesus Christ. When you are sure God has every reason to be angry at you, that's when God most of all treasures the moment you come back and say, "I'm sorry." He's reunited in love with you.

The LORD says through the prophet Zephaniah, *"The LORD your God is with you as a hero who will save you. He takes great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing."* (Zephaniah 3:17 EHV) Did you know that God loves to sing? Over you? Every time you come back like a treasured bride and nestle in His loving arms!

Now who do you know that needs God's **Relentless Love**? Go spark a party in heaven! Amen.