Go after the lost sheep until he finds it

Luke 15:1-10

Key Verse 15:4

**“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?**

I purchased many used cars about $2,000 for the first of my 20 years in America. If you want to find a good car with $2,000.00, you will find it is not easy. In order to buy a car with limited money you need to spend at least several days wholeheartedly looking at newspapers or internet. Then you can have a discerning mind and know which car is cheap and good mileage and which deal is good. But still to find a good car is not easy because you need to take risk. There are times when I made good decisions. For example,

one day in Long Beach, I paid $1,900.00 for the car of mileage about 190,000 mileage. Then msn Rebekah Kim asked me "Why did you pay $1,900.00 for a car of 190,000 mileage?" What happened was I went to see the car. And the owner showed me the cost of transmission repair which was done several months ago, and it was $1,800.00. I thought ‘well, the whole car other than transmission is only $100.00. And that is not bad deal!” I believed it was good finding. Indeed it was a good finding. I drove the car for several years. Then later I sold it to msn Moses Han with $100.00. That was one example that I could find a good car. But other times I made bad decisions. My $2,000.00 went away as a smoke in the air. Once msn Esther Lim and I were so excited that we found a very good car. But it turned out to be a junk.

Now today's passage shows God is also searching so hard to find a lost man. In fact, God searches the lost man so hard until he finds him. We can stop purchasing the car. But God would not stopping looking for a lost man. The man could be found only because God goes after him until he finds him. Today we would like to learn the love of God who goes after one lost sheep until he finds him. My message has two parts. Part I. I have found my lost sheep (v.1-7) Part II. I have found my lost coin (v.8-10)

**Part I. I have found my lost sheep (v.1-7)**

Look at verses 1 and 3.

“**Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. 3Then Jesus told them this parable: ”**

Today’s passage starts with the tax collectors and sinners who were all gathering around Jesus. The word ‘sinners’ means ‘all kinds of sinners’ except tax collectors. Tax collectors were a special kind of sinners because they sold their identity as God’s chosen people to make money. All other sinners such as prostitutes and robbers and murderers were classified as just ‘sinners’. And they were all gathering around Jesus. Why did they gather around Jesus? It was to ‘hear’ him. Jesus taught them the word of God. They all gathered around Jesus to hear the word of God.

But there were other group of people who were not happy with this scene. They were the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The Pharisees were famous in keeping Moses’ law the most. The teachers of the law were like bible teachers or shepherds. They were not happy when they saw a lot of tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus. To the Pharisees and the teachers of the law the gathering of the many tax collectors and sinners was not a pleasant scene. They did not like the scene. So they muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eat with them.” They complained in their hearts, ‘Why does this man welcomes sinners and eat with them? He should separate himself from them.”

Then Jesus told them this parable. So why did Jesus share today’s parables? It was to explain why he welcomes sinners and eat with them.

Look at verses 4-6.

**4“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’”**

This parable is so simple. It is common sense for the owner of the lost sheep to look for his lost sheep although he has other 99 sheep. Why? It is because his lost sheep is still very precious. The value of his lost sheep, although it is only one sheep, is revealed in the expression, ‘until he find it’. He goes after the lost sheep until when? Until he finds it. He would not say, “I did my best and I cannot find it anymore. I guest I have to give up on it.” No, he did not say it. He goes after the lost sheep until he finds it. We don’t know how long it takes for him to find it.

Is this reality? No. This is not reality but parable. In reality, the owner would not leave the 99 in the open country to look for one lost sheep. It would not make sense economically because you may lose 99 sheep for the sake of one lost sheep. In reality, he can look for the lost sheep to a certain degree. Then if the cost of looking for the lost sheep is greater than the price of the lost sheep he will stop. If someone goes after the lost sheep until he finds it regardless of cost he would be called as ‘fool’.

Indeed to go after one lost sheep until he finds, leaving 99 in the open country, does not make sense financially if searching extends many days. But in today’s parable the owner does it. Then when he finds the lost sheep he is so happy. So he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. He is so joyful that he cannot contain his joy within himself. So he calls his friends and neighbors together and said, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.” He may even want to have celebration party to find his lost sheep. The cost of having such a party can be more expensive than the cost of one sheep. But that is what he probably wants to do if possible.

What does Jesus want to teach through the parable? Look at verse 7.

**“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”**

Jesus was talking about rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. The 99 sheep in the open country can refer to the righteous persons who do not need to repent. They may refer to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They knew the word of God and they believed in God. They behaved properly. But the tax collectors and the sinners were criminals and they were thieves and robbers. They were murders and prostitutes and they were gangsters. They were lost. They were enemy of their own society.

This one sinner, or one murder, or one thief, or one prostitute, or one robber who repents, brings greater rejoicing in heaven over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent.

In the parable, the owner refers to God. And God is looking for one lost sheep at the cost of leaving the 99 in the open country. Why? Because he was seeking for the benefit of the lost sheep instead of himself. Certainly he will stop if he looks at his cost after certain time. But since he was seeking the interest of his lost sheep he kept looking for it until he finds it.

Now what does Jesus want to say to the Pharisees and teachers of the law who muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” through the parable?

Jesus was saying, “I welcomed the tax collectors and sinners and eats with them because I want to find lost ones, even one lost one.”

Today’s parable shows God’s value for one lost sheep. In today’s passage, the owner, who represents God, is looking for one lost sheep until he finds it. Why? It is because the lost sheep has ultimate value although he is only one sheep. According to Jesus, one soul is more precious than the whole world. The expression, ‘until he finds it’ shows its ultimate value before God. Therefore, God is ready to pay any and every and all cost to find the lost sheep even though it was only one.

Indeed God was even ready to pay his own ultimate cost – the cost of the life of his own Son, Jesus Christ - to find the lost sinners.

God blessed our ministry with the word of God and 1:1 bible study. God called our ministry to show how much he values one person. We support and help one person to the end of his life as long as he does not reject our help. To help one person to the end is such precious value in our ministry. Why? It is because God does so.

To go and find lost sinners until we find them is so important to sinners because that is the only way for them to be found. They do not know how to return. They even do not know they are lost. So someone has to help them. If we do not know God who put such an absolute value on one lost soul we would not have our ministry. But God called our ministry to be the 1:1 ministry. God wants to find one lost sinner until he finds him. And he is using us his own body.

When I did not know God personally, I was longing to meet someone who can help me to meet God personally. But where can I make such request? Who can help me until I find God?” In this materialistic society where we are limited by time and space and money, who can love me to the point where he can help me until I find God? Who?

Amazingly there were such people who are called by God. In UBF I found there were even many.

My first bible teacher, although she only helped me within a year, poured out her love for me. Her love made me so happy although I was not born again. And I did not know why I was so happy. Years later after I was born again I realized it was the love of God poured upon my life through her. Eventually God led me to missionary Isaac Kim and I was born again. Indeed when I look back it was God who goes after me until he finds me. He never gave up on me. The value of my life, although I am only one lost person, was more valuable than the whole universe in the sight of God. So God was ready to invest everything he has in order to find me. He did so by using all of his precious servants, my bible teachers and spiritual seniors. God poured out his own love for me through them. So I am eternally thankful for them.

I am eternally thankful to God who did not abandon me but goes after me until he finds me when I was lost. The same story is for all of us. In this world where we are limited by time and space and money and everything where can we find such person who can go after us until we find God? Who? There are people. They are the ones who were once lost and found by God.

Think about Seth whom missionary Monica goes after for the last 5 or 6 years. Why does she go after him for the last 5 or 6 years? Why? Is something wrong with her? Does she not know the value of her time and money and effort in her life? Does she not know she can use her time for someone else or something else? Why does she go after Seth year after year when Seth may not know what she is doing? Why? It is because missionary Monica represents God who goes after one lost soul until he finds it.

I heard missionary Mari Lopez restored the 1:1 bible study with Shirly who stopped the 1:1 for about 2 years if I remember correctly after about 4 years of bible study. Now missionary Mari started to have 1:1 again with her because Shirly is willing. Not only is msn Mari willing to study with her but also she is so joyful. Why? Because God poured out his own joy in the heart of msn Mari.

When missionary Isaac Kim helped people sometimes I could not understand what he was doing. There was one person whose is Jeff Wright. He was one of old bible students. I saw several times missionary Isaac was ready to help him at the cost of our whole ministry. Also I saw the same thing in helping Neal Renzi. I could not understand missionary Isaac Kim who was ready to use all our church resources and people to help one person although he was trouble maker. Therefore sometimes, I cried in my heart, “What about others? What about the other 99 in the open country?” Surely I thought it was not fair to pour everything for one person, one lost sheep. But that is how God deals with each one of us. God does not calculate in helping us. God is ready to use his unlimited time and money and resources of all of his people and even the very life of his own Son in order to go after us until he finds us when we are lost. Praise God! We thank God for his unconditional mercy us who have been lost.

What if God does not go after us until he finds us? What if God goes after us for some time and say, “Well, I go after John Kwon for 8 years. I think I have done enough. Enough is enough. I am going to go after other one.” What would happen to me if God did? I would remain as a lost sinner forever. What would happen to you if God did to you? You would all live as eternally lost sheep. We would all be in lost condition forever.

**Part II. I have found my lost coin (v.8-10)**

Look at verses 8-10.

**8“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’10In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

The same truth is explained again here. But this time for a woman. We know God created man and woman differently. One day I was a little bit shocked by the difference between man and woman.

When I attended Russian Summer Bible Conference in St. Petersburg about 12 years ago I met one shepherdess from Korea whom I did not meet for about 20 years. So we were very happy and we were busy to catch up. Then we wanted to take a picture together. So we asked someone to take a picture together. But she wanted to change the place. So I asked her why? Her answer was “Oh, it is not pretty”. To her the background was not pretty. At that moment I was a little bit shocked because I never thought about whether the background was pretty or not. Actually I don’t care much about beauty of background. All I cared it for two people in the picture! So when she said, “It is not pretty” I said in my heart, ‘Wow! Man and woman are so different. She is talking about being pretty which I have never thought about.”

In today’s passage, compared to a sheep to man, Jesus talked about ten silver coins to a woman. I am sure she valued the ten silver coins because they are beautiful. And it must have special value to her. She lost one. Then she searches carefully until she finds her. The same spirit of searching and finding is explained her. The same joy was explained. After she find the lost coin, she calls her friends and neighbors together and say “rejoice with me. I have found my lost coin.”

Verse 10 reads, “**’In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

So heavenly joy is there when one sinner repents.

Now what does it mean to repent? To repent in today’s passage means to be found by God. It means to become God’s possession.

Let’s think about from the point of lost sheep. Let us suppose the lost sheep has intelligence like us. Then the lost sheep can think from his point of view and could say, ‘Hew! Finally I am free now. Oh Boy, I was under the possession of my owner, and I did not have my freedom. Now he is gone forever, and I am free! I am free! Yahoo! I can enjoy my freedom!” He may be free. But his freedom means he does not belong to his owner.

God is the owner of our soul. If we do not belong to God to whom do we belong? Ourselves. The problem is ourselves are selfish and proud. So if we follow ourselves we are doomed to die. Only when we belong to God and offer our will and life to God and ask us to be our owners we can maintain our sanity and be prosperous. We ourselves is at the core of our problems.

When we do not belong to God but ourselves we are lost. Do you need evidence? See what we do when we are our own owners? All kinds of sinful acts comes out from us. Surely, the lost sheep and the lost coin are the ones whose owner is not God.

To repent means to belong to God’s possession again. In order to become God’s possession we have to repent. What do we need to repent? We need to repent because we put ourselves at the center of ourselves. We belong to ourselves. We become the owner of ourselves. But in order to become disciples of Jesus, we need to take down ourselves from the position of God. The truth is explained on the last Sunday message as ‘no one can become Jesus’ disciples unless he is ready to give up everything he has.’

Being lost does not mean it happens only when we do know God personally. It can happen many times when we do not surrender our will and our lives to God, asking God to be the owner of our lives after we are born again. When we are lost, when God is our owner we become useless.

Lost sheep and lost coins does not have value. Lost coins is just piece of metal. Its value is restored only when it is found by the owner. Then it is beautiful and useful and valuable.

I know one man who was lost after he met God.  Completely lost.  He was deep into fire of hell and could not get out of it.  He was told he would go to prison if he didn't stop his criminal activity.  His good family was broken and shattered. He had two sons and their relationship was completely broken. They did not love their father and could not respect him. The man had no real job for 15 long years, just a little bit of work here and there. But Jesus found this man again and again until his life has completely changed. He is happy. His son recently took him side and told him he was proud of his father and loved him.

Our repentance is to be found by God and belong to God’s possessions again and again. Then he can use us according to his will. So in repentance ‘humility’ comes first. Unless we are ready to completely humble and admit that we cannot manage our live we cannot repent truly.

Of course, we cannot repent and return to God with our will power. But as we make firm decisions and offer ourselves to God and ask his help he will give us power and wisdom. He will lead us to him again and we can belong to him. Then we restores our own value. We become useful to him. We become useful to others. We become blessing to others. But all of such beautiful restoration work of God comes from God who goes after us until he finds us. Praise God!

One word: go after the lost sheep until he finds it.