

LOST, PART 3 - LOST AND FOUND

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

2 Corinthians 4:4 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

Today we are finishing a series called LOST. The award-winning TV series by the same name has been so popular that it has achieved almost cult-like status. We're not here to promote it, because it has all the junk and trappings of Hollywood like most of the other TV offerings out there. However, we are here to ask this question: "Why does a series like 'Lost' resonate so clearly with such a large audience?"

We've always been fascinated with the subject. From classic literature like Swiss Family Robinson and Robinson Crusoe to long-running comedies like Gilligan's Island to modern films like Castaway, the scenario of people being stranded somewhere through no fault of their own resonates with us. Lost in a place where their surroundings are full of danger and uncertainty. Lost in a place where, regardless of who else is around, every single day is preoccupied with two all-consuming passions ... I must survive, and I must find a way to be rescued.

The premise for the new series is a frightening one. Oceanic Air flight 815 tears apart in midair and crashes on a Pacific island. Stripped of everything, its survivors are forced into a vicious existence in cruel weather and harsh terrain. They discover that the island holds many mysterious and dangerous secrets, not the least of which is wondering if those they are marooned with may turn against them at any moment! Some panic. Some pin all their hopes on rescue. Some retaliate against others. Some fall into isolation and depression. A few find inner strength they never knew they had. The characters seem familiar, almost like people we should know ...

- a young singer who has wrecked his career due to a drug addiction
- a couple who feels isolated because they are of a different race
- a woman who desperately tries to hide her criminal past
- a father and son who have never really gotten to know each other
- a nice guy who does his best to help everyone else
- a soldier who is haunted by his sadistic cruelty to others in the past
- a reckless drifter who instinctively mistrusts those around him
- a wealthy young woman whose world revolves only around herself
- a workaholic who has never been able to get his father's approval

Just a TV show, right? But is real life all that different? We ARE these people! **We feel LOST ... and being "lost" is our deepest fear.**

Jesus came to seek and to save the LOST. That was His mission; he talked about it constantly. Luke 15 is the Bible's **LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT**, in which Jesus tells a trilogy of stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. The final story is the longest, the most eloquent and the most moving ... because this time, it involves a SON ... **he could be any one of us ... in fact, he IS every one of us ...**

Luke 15:11-16 (MSG) ¹¹ Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.' "So the father divided the property between them. ¹³ It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. ¹⁴ After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. ¹⁵ He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. ¹⁶ He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

According to Jewish law, an elder son received twice as much as the other sons (Deuteronomy 21:17), and a father could distribute his wealth during his lifetime if he wished. It was perfectly LEGAL for the younger son to ask for his share of the estate and even to sell it, but it was as though he were saying to his father, "I wish you were already dead."

For us, the distant country is not necessarily a place to which we TRAVEL; it exists first and foremost as a place within our HEART. Before sin is ever a DEED against God, it is always first a DISTANCE from God.

Isaiah 59:1-2 (NLT) Listen! The Lord is not too weak to save you, and he is not becoming deaf. He can hear you when you call. But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.

The word "prodigal" means "wasteful." Once the son left the restraint of his father, he became reckless. But life in the distant country was not at all what he expected. While he had money, he had friends. But when his resources were gone, so were they! He joined ("glued") himself to a citizen who sent him to feed pigs – the lowest humiliation for a Jewish boy! This is what sin does: it promises freedom, but only brings slavery; it promises success, but only brings failure; it promises life, but "the wages of sin is death!" (Romans 6:23)

John 8:34-36 (MSG) Jesus said, "I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave. A slave is a transient, who can't come and go at will. The Son, though, has an established position, the run of the house. So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through. "

Luke 15:17-24 (MSG) ¹⁷ "That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. ¹⁸ I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; ¹⁹ I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' ²⁰ He got right up and went home to his father. "When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. ²¹ The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' ²² "But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! ²⁴ My son is here — given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

If he had only thought about himself and his situation, the prodigal son would have experienced regret or remorse, but not REPENTANCE. Repentance involves the WILL, and not just the EMOTIONS ("I will arise ... I will go ... I will say"). METANOIA means "a change of mind." He left home with the words "give me" (my inheritance – v.12) but returned with the words "make me" (a servant – v.19). He had experienced a complete change of attitude. **And when he really changed his mind, he was willing to change his direction.** That's real repentance!

2 Corinthians 7:10 (NLT) For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death.

Jesus was not the first teacher to tell the story of the prodigal son; in fact, it was a common story in His day. But the rabbis' ending was very different ... the prodigal son arrived home to find that he was NOT welcome! The father rejected him, the father had died, the estate had been sold, etc. There were dozens of variations, but always with the same theme to teach rebellious sons a lesson.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (CEV) A father and a mother may have a stubborn and rebellious son who refuses to obey them even after he has been punished. If a son is like that, his parents must drag him to the town gate, where the leaders of the town hold their meetings. The parents will tell the leaders, "This son of ours is stubborn and never obeys. He spends all his time drinking and partying." The men of the town will stone that son to death, because they must get rid of the evil he brought into the community. Everyone in Israel will be afraid when they hear how he was punished.

Why did Jesus change the ending? Because at some point it has to stop being about "the sin" and start being about "the sinner."

It was a breach of an elderly Jewish man's dignity to run, but the father had been waiting a long time for this homecoming! He saw him when he was still "a great way off" and met him there. It was very possible that the elders of the city would have wanted to stone this rebellious son, but they couldn't when he was wrapped in the arms of his father! Servants did not wear rings, shoes, or expensive garments – but the prodigal son received them all! If he had received LAW there would have been a FUNERAL, but because he received LOVE there was a FEAST.

Psalm 103:8-13 The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

What is it that keeps prodigals away from home? Certainly not the Father! Do you know what it is? It's their fear of the Elder Brother!

Luke 15:25-32 (MSG) ²⁵ "All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶ Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. ²⁷ He told him, 'Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast — barbecued beef! — because he has him home safe and sound.' ²⁸ "The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. ²⁹ The son said, 'Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? ³⁰ Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!' ³¹ "His father said, 'Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours — ³² but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!' "

THERE WERE TWO PRODIGAL SONS! One LEFT the house and wasted his inheritance, but the other STAYED in the house and wasted his inheritance. In all these years, he had worked hard but never once enjoyed a party with his father! **He was a SON, but he acted like a SLAVE!** He needed to repent of his attitude and return to the father's house just as much as his younger brother. He had nothing to lose by his brother's return, but he had grown too protective of the father's house! He did his father's will, but not from the heart. **HE WAS ALSO LOST!**

If you're a prodigal, come home! The Father is waiting! But if you're an elder brother, don't stand outside in the cold! Come on in!