



The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 6

January 13, 2019

No. 2

Seeing the Lost

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You probably thought that title was a typo, didn't you? It's kind of like the preacher who sent in his subject to be printed on the lectureship flyer: "Be Aware of the Lost." What got printed was "Beware of the Lost!" That's the way we act at times.

Jesus made certain that people knew His purpose for coming to the world. When He was criticized for keeping company with tax gatherers and sinners, He responded, "For even the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). How could He *save* them if He did not first *seek* them?

As disciples of the Master, we must make Jesus' mission our own. But we will not seek the lost until we first see the lost as God sees them. Luke 15 has rightly been called "the gospel within the gospel." In this great chapter, Jesus told three parables that help us see the lost through the eyes of heaven.

God seems them as straying sheep of His pasture. The first parable is about a shepherd who had 100 sheep and lost one (15:3-7). Our first reaction might be, "he's still got 99. A 1% loss is not bad in the business world." But for shepherds, this was not business; it was personal. The shepherd did not stay behind the flock and push them. He walked in front and led them. He took them to green pastures and still waters. He called them by name; they knew his voice. He inspected them every day. He protected them from danger and defended them with his own life. What motivated Jesus to show such compassion toward sinners? "They were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

God wants every single sheep. He doesn't care about percentages or play the odds. His desire is for "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). We see them as a sheep who are lost because of their own stupidity. They wandered away, following after anything, always looking for greener pastures. They found a hole in the fence and couldn't find their way back. God sees them as sheep that He wants back in the safety of His fold. Remember, "all we like sheep have gone astray" (Isa. 53:6). Let us help the lost return to the Shepherd and Guardian of their souls (1 Pet. 2:25).

God sees them as souls that are precious. The second parable is about a woman who had ten coins and lost one (15:8-10). The Greek *drachma* was similar to the Roman denarius in that it was equivalent to one day's wages. But the value of this coin may have been in the sentimental value of the set of 10. Ten silver coins was likely something similar to a wedding dowry. Perhaps she strung them together and wore them as a necklace or headband. What did she do when she lost one? Lit a lamp, swept the house, and searched "carefully" or diligently (15:8).

God sees the value of every single soul. It was just one coin. She still had nine. But each one was priceless. Sometimes we marvel at the patience and longsuffering of God as we read through the O.T. How many times would we have wiped out Israel for their rebellion, murmuring, and lack of faith? Like the shepherd, this woman searched until she found it (15:4,8). Perhaps we're not as diligent because we see the lost as a lost cause.

God sees them as children away from home. The third parable in the chapter is about a father who lost one son (15:11-24). The younger son, after he had squandered his estate on prodigal living in the far country, came to himself. And like the sinners who came near to listen to Jesus, he went home. What was the father's attitude toward his return? He "felt

compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him" (15:20). He gave him a robe, a ring, and sandals and killed the fattened calf which had probably been reserved with hope for that very day.

God forgives and then rejoices in repentance. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God; and such we are" (1 John 3:1). The Creator and the Almighty is the Father of all. He wants each child home. Every lost soul must be seen as our "brother" or "sister" created in the image of God.

Be aware of the lost. You won't seek them until you see them as God does. In this season of lights, don't leave them in the dark.

Are We (As Some Claim) Making Divorce an Unforgivable Sin?

- by Frank Himmel

Jesus said, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another woman, commits adultery" (Mt. 19:9).

What if a man does what Jesus prohibited? He divorces his wife simply because he no longer loves her, then later he marries another woman. Clearly, he is guilty of adultery. Now, what if this man wants to be forgiven? Let's assume he is not a Christian. He learns about Jesus' atonement, believes, and wants to be baptized into Christ. Can he continue in his marriage to his second wife? Many say yes, since baptism is for forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). If someone objects that this unauthorized remarriage is still adultery, the objector may be accused of making divorce/adultery an unforgivable sin.

What if a man is married to multiple women? (It is illegal in this country, but not in all.) He ignores God's law of one man, one woman (Mt. 19:5-6). He is guilty of polygamy. Now, what if this man wants to be forgiven? He, too, wants to be baptized into Christ. Can he continue to live with all these woman? If not, why not? Why does forgiveness not cleanse his wrong relationships? Is polygamy an unforgivable sin?

What if a man is living with a woman? They don't bother with marriage, they just live together. Their cohabitation makes them guilty of fornication (Heb. 13:4). Now, what if this man wants to be forgiven? He, too, wants to be baptized into Christ. Can he continue to live with the woman? If not, why not? Why does forgiveness not cleanse his wrong relationship? Is fornication an unforgivable sin?

What if a man is living with another man? They are not merely roommates, they are lovers: "men with men committing indecent acts" (Rom. 1:27). They are guilty of homosexuality. Now, what if this man wants to be forgiven? He, too, wants to be baptized into Christ. Can he continue to live with the man? If not, why not? Why does forgiveness not cleanse his wrong relationship? Is homosexuality an unforgivable sin?

Four relationships. Each one is wrong. Why, then, do so many say that the last three must end if one wants to be right with God, but the first may continue? What's the difference? The only difference I see is that the first is more socially acceptable. (It will be interesting to see how the fourth is viewed as homosexuality becomes increasingly acceptable.)

The question is not, What sin(s) can be forgiven? The question is, What does God require in order to be forgiven? God requires repentance, as well as belief and baptism (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). Repentance is a change of heart and a corresponding change of life (Lk. 3:8-14; Acts 26:20). One has not repented when he determines to continue right on in his sin, whatever it is. And one who will not repent cannot expect to be forgiven.