

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN

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### Luke 15:8-10

Today we are going to look at this beautiful parable of the Lord's teaching in Luke 15:8-10, what is usually called the Parable of the Lost Coin. I have no hesitation to say that it is a very beautiful parable and yet, it is stated so briefly in these three verses. This is what we read. Luke 15:8-10.

*Luke 15:8. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?*

*9 And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!'*

*10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

### Joy in heaven

In this parable, the coin that is found represents us. We are that one sinner who repents and that causes heaven to rejoice. Heaven is a place of joy, and that joy is increased by the sinner who repents. If you didn't care about whether a person is saved or not, of course you wouldn't rejoice. But because God so cares, and the angels of God so care for man, that when he repents, they rejoice. When I see my children growing in maturity, I rejoice because I care for them. If I didn't care, whatever happens to them wouldn't affect me. Because God cares for our spiritual well-being and because the angels care, they rejoice when we repent and receive the gift of salvation. This notion of joy in heaven over the salvation of a sinner who repents is a major emphasis of this parable.

Many commentators, after explaining the previous parable, the Parable of the Lost Sheep, don't seem to have much to say when they come to the Parable of the Lost Coin, except to say that these two parables are quite similar. Some might even say that it is merely a repetition of the previous parable.

If we look at these two parables from the point of view of their similarities, I do agree that they are quite similar. Something is lost, it is found and there is joy in heaven. But I think that we are missing a lot of the richness that is found in the Parable of the Lost Coin if we only look at their points of resemblance. I would like to suggest that if we also look at the differences, the meaning of this parable will become even more striking, as I hope that you will see in a moment.

### When God loses a coin

Now, let's just first describe this parable. The picture is quite simple. There is this woman who has ten silver coins, or ten drachma as it is written in certain translations. Each silver coin is worth

approximately what a person earns for one day's wages. So what she has in ten coins is approximately what a person would take ten days to earn, ten working days. That is not much. Some scholars think that these coins were the ones that a woman of that time would use on her head dress. Middle East women often had a head dress decorated with coins. They used coins in which they would drill a little hole in it and they would put them on their head dress as decoration.

In this parable, it is not said that the coin is part of her head dress. This is really guessing. And it doesn't really matter. The point is that if she has only ten coins, to lose one out of the ten is to lose quite a big proportion of that. If you had hundreds of coins and you lose one, you probably wouldn't notice it. But if you have only ten coins, you will notice it if you lose one.

All this is to indicate that the sinner is precious to God. You are precious to God. He doesn't want to say that you are just one out of a billion, and if you didn't exist, God wouldn't notice it. No, if you are missing, if you are not in the kingdom of God, if you are not saved, God notices it. And that hurts His heart. But when you repent and are saved, God rejoices. That's the whole meaning of the joy in heaven.

### **Who is this woman?**

So we are this coin that is lost. But who is this woman? This parable is different from the previous one in that it speaks about a woman who lost a coin. Conceivably a man could lose a coin too, but the Lord Jesus is not speaking of a man here. He is speaking of a woman. Why is there a reference to a woman here? Is there any significance in it? I think that there is a reason why a woman is mentioned.

A quick answer would be to say that the woman represents God looking for sinners. And obviously, it is correct, but I think there is more to it. And the more I ponder about it, the more I think that the woman is also a representation of the church. In the New Testament teaching, you will notice that the church is often represented by a female. For example, the church is spoken of as a bride, or as a virgin, or as the wife of the Lamb. In Revelation 12, it is described as *a woman clothed with the sun*. Of course, this is not to say that every time the Bible speaks of a woman, it refers to the church. But in the context of this parable, given what has gone before and what follows afterwards, I believe that it is correct to say that the woman represents the church.

Why is this so? Notice that in the first parable, the Lord Jesus is speaking about Himself as the shepherd seeking the lost sheep. But how does He seek for those who are lost here and now, at this moment, if it is not through His church? How were you found if it was not that God works through His church to find those who are lost? How is the Lord seeking those who are perishing today? Is it not through you and through me? God seeks after the sinners through the agency of the people of God, through the family of believers, through the church.

### **Light of the world**

We find the same parable when the Lord Jesus speaks of the light. He says in John 8:12 that He is the light of the world. But He also says that we are the light of the world. This means that He, as light, shines into the world through us, i.e. through His church. In the same way, we find the same parable here. In the first instance, in the Parable of the Lost Sheep, He is the shepherd who seeks and saves the lost. Then, in the Parable of the Lost Coin, we find that the woman is the church through which He works to save that which is lost. Do you see the beauty of it? And that is not all.

Notice what the Lord Jesus said earlier in Luke. Let me read to you Luke 8:16-17.

*Luke 8:16. Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, in order that those who come in may see the light.*  
*17 For nothing is hidden that shall not become evident, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.*

Notice these words. *No one after lighting a lamp covers it, ... but he puts it on a lampstand, in order that those who come in may see the light.* What is the first thing that the woman does in the parable? She lights a lamp (v. 8). And that is the first thing that the church must do, to light the lamp, to let the light shine forth. The Lord Jesus is the light of the world. We are the light of the world. And we light the lamp when we let God's light to shine through us both by the way we live and the message that we preach.

*Luke 8:16. Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, in order that those who come in may see the light.*

The lamp shines in order to bring to light that which is hidden, so that what is lost may be found. The Bible tells us that the gospel is also that light. Psalm 119:105 says that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet. The gospel is light not because there is some magical power in the gospel itself but because God's light is shining through the gospel. And ultimately, it is God's light because God is light. 2Samual 22:29 says that 'the Lord is my light and my salvation.' God is light. May we let Him shine and let nothing hide that light.

## **Lost in the dust**

The next thing that the woman does after lighting the lamp is to sweep. When do you sweep a place? It is when you need to clean a place. The spiritual meaning of this sweeping is extremely important. It is that of a cleansing process. God is cleansing away the dirt and the dust that hides us from the light. Let me explain more fully what I mean.

This coin is lost in the dust, the dust on this mud floor that we have in the Palestinian houses in those days. This word 'dust' is a very interesting word and I would like to tell you three things about its meaning in the OT in relationship to our parable.

First of all, we are made out of dust. You all know this passage in Genesis 2:7 where it says that *God formed man of the dust of the ground*. Our physical body is described in terms of dust. Think about what happens at a cremation. What is left of the body is dust and ashes. This coin, which has fallen into the dust, is obscured by the dust. And that is a very important reason why man falls. Man falls by letting his physical nature dominate him. Therefore the spiritual aspect of man is lost in the midst of the dust of his carnal nature, of his fleshly nature. A man who is lost in sin is dominated by the physical aspect of life. His life is limited by the satisfaction given by his car, his house, his career, his money, by the next trip that he can afford. This is all that matters for him. What he doesn't know is that his eyes are clouded by this dust. He cannot see the things which are eternal. For him, spiritual realities cease to exist. That 'physical' is all that matters. He may be physically alive, but spiritually, he is dead.

The second thing that we see in the word 'dust' is this. The expression 'to go to the dust' in the OT often refers to death. 'To go to the dust' means 'to die'. We find this for example in Psalm 22:19 where David says, *You have brought me to the dust of death*. This coin has fallen into the dust. That means, it is to fall into death. So here is my second point. Because of man's engrossment with the physical things of life, because the physical is the only reality for him, the result of this is death, spiritual death. Man is lost in the dust of death. He is spiritually dead.

The third thing about 'dust' is that 'dust' means humiliation in the Bible. Psalm 72:9 says, *Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust*. Imagine, to

lick the dust! You get the picture? To be in the dust is to be humiliated, to be degraded, to go as low as man can go. And sin is this humiliating element. Have you ever noticed how sin can be humiliating? I am always reminded of this when I hear of a crime committed by someone. You often see the criminal hiding his face in front of the camera in utter humiliation, with his arm or a piece of cloth in front of his head. Sin is so degrading, so revolting to the righteous.

## **Out of the dust**

And at some point, we were all in that condition, utterly humiliated by our own sins. But you know, there is a good news. Because there is a wonderful God who wants to bring us out of this miserable condition. In connection to this, let me read to you this passage in Psalm 113, and you will see how wonderful is this God. Psalm 113:4-9.

*Psalm 113:4. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.  
5 Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwells on high,  
6 who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!*

Notice. Our God is a mighty God. Nothing is above Him, and yet, He humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth. And what does He do? Listen to this key verse.

*Psalm 113:7. He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap;  
8 that he may set him with princes, with the princes of his people.  
9 He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord.*

Yes, praise the Lord! He raises the poor out of the dust. You remember the Sermon on the Mount where the Lord Jesus said, *Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. God raises the poor of this world from the dust, from the humiliation, from the degradation of sin. And He lifts them up to sit with princes. He makes us to be sons of God. That is salvation. If we repent, if we let God change us and transform us, then He will lift us out of the dust and make us to sit with princes as the children of God. And in this, we can rejoice.

Now let's go back to our parable. This woman is sweeping the floor, hoping to find the coin. What does the sweeping have to do with the coin? The coin, in coming in contact with the broom, is swept clean of the dust. The dust is removed from it. When the gospel makes contact with you, it removes the dust that covers you. And you are delivered from the three things that I just mentioned. You are delivered from the engrossment to the physical things of life. You are delivered from a sure spiritual death. And you are delivered from the degradation of sin. And God lifts us up. In the first chapter of Ephesians, the apostle Paul tells us that God has seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. Wow! You can't go higher than that, seated with Christ in the heavenly places! Do you see that this parable tells us so much about God's wonderful work of salvation?

## **Responding to God's salvation**

Now, understand this well. You must understand that salvation is offered to everyone but not everyone is saved. What makes the difference is repentance. In order to be saved, we must repent of our sins with a sincere heart. Notice that a silver coin, with time, turns dark and black because it is covered with dross. And hence, it is hard to see when it is lost on the ground, mixed with dust. What helps the woman to find the coin is the tingling of the coin upon the ground when the broom sweeps the dust that is on it. This tingling of the coin represents the response of man to the sweeping of the gospel. You see, it is not only that God seeks us but we must produce a response. This is more fully stated in the last word of this parable, in the word 'repents'. *There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*. That response to the gospel is what repentance is about. We cannot make ourselves clean but we can respond to the sweeping of the gospel in making the sound.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat what I said at the beginning. Every time a sinner turns back to God and repents, there is great joy in heaven because you and I are important to God. He cares for your soul, for the salvation of your soul. This parable gives us a great deal of insight into God's character. It tells us about the way God looks at man. It shows how God looks not only at human beings, but at a lost human being, at a sinner. And we see how God's heart goes after the lost person. And what is more, it is not only how He looks at the sinner but what He does about it. It is not simply that He has some good intentions but that He acts upon it.

Here salvation is seen through God's eyes. You see, this kind of parable, only God can tell. Man cannot write such a parable because that's not the way he looks at the sinner. And here, I am referring also to Christians. Too often, I have seen Christians showing an attitude of superiority towards the non-Christian. Just like the Pharisees, they are quick to condemn those who fall. But God is not like that. He has a compassionate attitude towards the sinner.

May we learn, by God's grace, to express this kind of attitude towards those who are lost in the dust of this world.