

The Lost Coin

Luke 15: 8 – 10

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My wife, Sherry, says I lose a lot of things. That's not really true. I don't lose them. I just misplace them. How about you? Do you lose, or should I say "misplace" something every now and then? Sure you do. We all do. Whether it's a set of keys, a wallet, or a cell phone things go missing. That's why this brief little passage of Scripture about a lost coin resonates with just about all of us.

So let me begin by saying that when we lose something and eventually find it there is a three stage process that we inevitably experience—"panic," "pursuit" and hopefully "praise." Let me illustrate with a personal example out of my own life. Sherry and I lived in a parsonage when we served a church in Reidsville, North Carolina. Every time I cut the grass, I had to mow around a small, raised metal pipe that marked the edge of the property. One day I decided to fix this inconvenience. I drove the pipe into the ground and went inside to get a metal disk that I could fasten to the pipe at ground level. In that way I could mow right over this boundary marker with no problems. I returned with the disk and looked for the pipe but couldn't find it. That's when the emotion known as "panic" began to rise up. What would the church's property committee say when I told them that I had lost the boundary marker? So I quickly went to the parsonage's tool shed, got a shovel and began stabbing the ground in the hopes of hitting the pipe. That's known as the "pursuit" stage. You are desperately pursuing the lost object, searching for it here, there and everywhere. I made shovel indentations all over that part of the lawn. Finally, I stopped and realized that I needed help from on high. I looked up and prayed, "Lord, I need to find that pipe. If I don't, I'll be terribly embarrassed if I have to explain to the church what happened. Could you please help me?" Now you might not believe this, but this is actually what happened. After the prayer, I took the shovel stabbed the ground and immediately heard a metal clang. I had hit the pipe. That's when the third stage, "praise," took over. I praised the Lord and I was still rejoicing when I went inside and told Sherry what had happened.

My experience is echoed in the account that Jesus told about the woman who lost a silver coin. Hopefully you can imagine the panic that arose within her when she realized that one of her ten coins was missing. With a growing sense of dread that something of great value may be gone forever, she lit a lamp because housing in that part of the world was dark on the inside. Only a small window and a doorway provided any light for most homes. But that wasn't the only problem. Her home like nearly everyone else's home had a dirt floor covered with straw. So it was not just a matter of looking for the coin. It was a matter of sweeping. She began a desperate pursuit, or search for the lost coin, sweeping the entire inside of her home. It may have taken a long time, but she didn't give up. Eventually she saw it mixed in with the straw, reflected perhaps in the light of her lamp. Relieved at long last to have found it, her heart was filled with praise. She went outside and called together her friends and neighbors. Holding up the coin in her hand, she said, "Rejoice with me. I have found my lost coin."

This is a marvelous story and one that everyone who was listening to Jesus could easily understand. The same is true for you and me. We've all lost things. And like the widow and like myself, we've gone in search of them. But why did Jesus tell this story and what message is there within it that you and I can take home with us today? We'll get to that in just a moment, but before we do, I'd like to share a little side note with you that will perhaps prove to be helpful when you lose something. It's called the "Floating Ax Head." It's found in 1 Kings 6:1-7. Briefly stated, here's what happened. A group of prophetic students went down to the Jordan River to cut down trees for a new home. While they were chopping down the trees, an iron ax head flew off one of the handles and fell into the water. This was a great loss, since iron was scarce. Furthermore, the ax had been borrowed. Appealing to Elisha, their master, they asked him to help them retrieve the iron ax head. He agreed. He cut a stick, threw it in the water, and the ax head floated to the surface and was retrieved. Of course, it wasn't Elisha, but Elisha's God who made the iron float. In other words, God was willing to personally intervene to help His people recover that which was lost and the same is true today, even a lost metal boundary marker. Based on my memory of this Scriptural account, I uttered what I call a "floating ax head prayer," and you'd be surprised how often these kinds of prayers have been answered.

Now, getting back to Jesus' story about the lost coin, what can we discern from this account and take home with us today—three things. First, there's the silver coin. It was valuable in one of two ways. It may have represented a day's wages. At 15 dollars per hour for an eight hour work day, this would amount to \$120. That's a pretty good sum of money. I don't know about you, but I would go looking for a coin that was worth that much. Wouldn't you? However, there is another possibility. Women in the days of Jesus sometimes wore a head ornament which was comprised of a string of coins. You may have seen someone adorned like this in a Biblical movie, for example. For a married woman this piece of jewelry would have been like an expensive wedding ring. To lose one of the coins in this treasured possession would be both financially and emotionally distressing, especially for a widow. I suspect that whether the coin represented a day's wages, or was a treasured reminder of a past marriage, the message is unmistakable. Each and every one of us is valuable and that, my friends, is something that we all need to treasure in today's world. Why? Because America suffers from an epidemic of low self-esteem. It's reflected in drug and alcohol addiction and the rising rate of suicide. Turn on the TV and you'll be confronted by a whole host of advertisements for depression medications. We have a low opinion of ourselves. Instead of feeling like a valued coin, many people think of themselves as nothing more than a worn out penny.

Second, there's the widow and her ongoing search for the missing coin. She was not going to give up until she found it. This is a poignant reminder that in God's sight each of us is valuable and deserving of His careful search until we can be reclaimed. Like that coin which may have fallen into a darkened corner covered in filth, God is willing to reach down and pick us up, rub away the grime and let the beauty of our worth once again shine with the reflected glory of His presence. I believe that is exactly what Jesus had in mind when He was telling this story. Looking into the faces of those who were listening to Him, He saw immense potential and value. They might need His life giving touch to brighten their lives, but they were still valuable, worthy of His attention and concern. In fact, on one occasion that's precisely what He said. Responding to an accusation that He was eating with sinners He

replied, "It is not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick. For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13). In other words, I've come in search of lost coins, not treasure that has been tucked away for safe keeping.

Finally, there is that triumphant note of rejoicing. When the coin was recovered, the widow couldn't help herself. She had to tell her friends and neighbors that it had been found. In response, there was a scene of joyous pandemonium, everyone jumping for joy, clapping their hands and rejoicing with this widow as she proudly held up the coin for all to see. In like fashion Jesus said that that's what happens when a sinner repents and turns back to God. It's like finding a lost coin. There is great rejoicing among God's angels in heaven. On more than one occasion I have seen that kind of joy here on earth when a person walked down the aisle and gave their heart and life to the Lord. Friends and family gathered around and there was a time of great rejoicing. I can't help but wonder how much more wonderful it must be in heaven. In fact, I'm reminded of what one pastor said many years ago in response to a sinner's salvation, "I think I hear the clapping of nailed scarred hands."

And speaking of lost coins and the clapping of nailed scarred hands, let me tell you about a coin that no one thought would ever be recovered. Born in London in 1725, John Newton grew up in the home of a godly mother. However, she died when he was a little boy. So he went to sea with his dad, a sea captain. That proved to be an unfortunate decision, for he embraced a sailor's life in the worse kind of way. Wine, women and song, along with a dishonorable discharge from the Royal Navy, landed him among the dregs of society. Eventually he became the captain of slave ships carrying human cargo across the stormy Atlantic. Even his wicked friends turned against him. But not His God. Like the widow looking for a lost coin, Christ went out upon the high seas of sinfulness and reclaimed this wayward soul. Gradually coming to his senses, John Newton forsook the slave trade and became an ardent champion for its abolishment. He gave his heart and life to Christ and eventually became a well-known and respected pastor in the Church of England. While serving a church in Olney, England, he wrote an autobiographical hymn which we still sing today, "Amazing Grace." It describes his journey from wretchedness to salvation through the unfathomable grace of God. Near the end of his life, both blind and in frail health he said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!"

There are lots of lost coins in our world today. Like Newton, they may be worn and disfigured by abuse and neglect. Nevertheless they are precious to the Lord, and He will never stop looking for them. May we endeavor to join Him in that search, so that we along with all of the angels in heaven can rejoice when they are found.