

JJ¹

On the short list of comedians I like is Jeff Foxworthy. One reason is because he has a fairly clean act and because I can relate to a lot of his comedy. One of his jokes begins with him complaining about losing things, like the remote control. He says, "I walk around the house, saying, 'Somebody stole the remote control.' And my wife says, 'That's right, Jeff, somebody broke into our home, passed up the jewelry, and stole your remote control.' "

How many of you guys are guilty of that? I certainly am. Just think of all that effort we put into finding a piece of plastic and batteries all just so we could use our time to go into our nothing box instead of doing more important things. Just think of how much it bugs you until you find that lost remote! If only we were so concerned about seeking out lost souls!

You'd think that would be an easy decision to make—plastic, batteries and wasted time...or...lost souls found for eternity? And it's not always remote controls and TVs. For Jesus' audience that day he used the example of one lost sheep out of 100, and one lost coin worth a week's wages. Both far more valuable than a remote control. What it boils down to is the value we place on our time and efforts compared to that of a lost soul.

Today Jesus teaches us how to **LEARN TO LOVE THE LOST**. And how sad that you and I often need a lesson in this department! Today we hear the first two parables in a string of three. The third perhaps the most famous of Jesus' parables—the Parable of the Lost Son(s). The audience is the same—the spiritual elite of Israel. Again we see they were filled with disgust because of the audience Jesus allowed to be around him. Tax collectors were considered betrayers of Israel. The "sinners" would have included criminals of different sorts, prostitutes and the like. People who had committed so-called great outward sins. Jesus' enemies complained, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

They would have never dreamed of associating with such people, and how much more ridiculous for their Messiah to do so!

How many strikes do people get with you? Is it one and done? Do they get three? Does it depend on who they are or what they've done or are doing? What's your own personal threshold where you wash your hands of people?

Is it as shallow as the color of their skin, or the language that they speak? Is it as

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

petty as the clothes they wear or political allegiances? Is it as short fused as someone gossiping about you? Or maybe your threshold extends a bit further. Maybe you draw the line at murderers, pedophiles and rapists. Maybe it's those living together outside of marriage. Maybe it's the homosexual. Maybe it's the child who says they don't believe. Maybe it's the spouse who has broken your heart.

Whatever your own person threshold is, friends, you know how you have not loved the lost. You know how terribly often you have not only refused to be concerned about the lost, but even wished evil on them.

Sometimes we actively refuse to love the lost, and sometimes we're also passive. Are you even approachable to them? Consider all the people I just described. Why would the person beyond your threshold even want to pass through the doors of our church to hear God's Word if that is how you react to them, whether in the privacy of your homes or in public?

Friends, I am not making light of any sin or the disastrous spiritual condition of the lost. Jesus doesn't either. The sins of the lost are indeed great and numerous and make each one of them worthy of hell. But that's not the sin Jesus addresses today. It's your sin and my sin of not loving the lost! It's your sin and my sin of

being blind to our own darkness that should make us sick to our stomachs when we see it in the light.

Friends, if these are the people who were crowding around Jesus as he was making his way to Jerusalem but we refuse to welcome or give the impression that they're not welcome, then we've got a big problem! Friends, if these are the people God longs to get to know and to save and we turn up our noses at them, then we

should be terrified because we are standing against the saving will of God—the very same saving will that brought you to faith and longs to have you by his side at his eternal banquet! Then *we* are the ones committing the most disgusting sin.

It's a good thing you and I aren't God. Good thing God is God because his greatest desire is a perfect never ending desire to seek and to

save the lost. And how reckless our God is in saving the likes of you and me, you and me who not only were once numbered among the lost, but sadly fall into the same arrogance of the Pharisees.

We get a glimpse into the reckless love of God in the two parables. God is a shepherd unlike any earthly shepherd. Chances are good that no earthly shepherd would leave 99 sheep in the wilderness unattended and vulnerable to attack for hours or more just to find one lost



sheep. No person would after finding a week's wages invite the town over for a huge banquet that would cost more than what was lost. But that is the reckless love of our God. He patiently seeks us out and pays the ultimate price to win us—the blood of his Only Son. And what's more, he throws a big party once he wins us for himself! God is jumping for joy for every sinner who repents like David dancing in Jerusalem when the ark was brought into the city (2 Samuel 6).

And even now today, friends, Jesus washes away your sins. He forgives your unwillingness to love the lost and teaches you to put to death your arrogance by showing you just how big his love is. He does it through lessons like today. He invites us to marvel over the reckless, boundless love he has for the outcasts and dregs of society. He invites us to be amazed at the love he has for you and me who so often have stood against his greatest desire. How comforting to know that our God doesn't turn away in disgust, but sent his Son to the cross to suffer our eternity in hell and made his grave empty after three days, all so that your grave would stand open and empty on the Last Day with a glorified body rising above it to the eternal banquet of heaven!

Friends, it is with that love and forgiveness that we **LEARN TO LOVE THE LOST** and then do it, too. As we do this, it's important for us to realize that loving

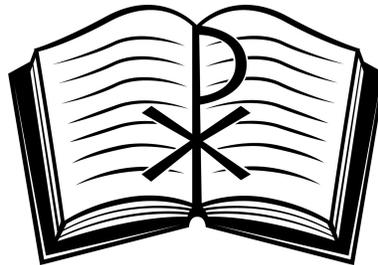
and seeking the lost doesn't just mean you make yourself approachable and nice. Rejoicing comes when we've also faithfully applied God's Word to their lives—the law to their sin, the gospel to work faith and repentance.

Those things must go along with our genuine concern for the lost. Otherwise we're just nice people, and being nice never got anyone into heaven. Just consider Jesus. Do you think he didn't address the sin of those who came to him? Jesus was welcoming to them, but was not accepting of their sin. Just think of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4). She'd been married and divorced five times and now was living with a man who wasn't her husband. Jesus very directly pointed out her sin. And you know what, Jesus did that

and she still invited the

whole town to come out and meet Jesus. Why? Not to stone him to death for being mean for calling her to repentance, but to see the Messiah she now believed in! When Jesus saw her, he saw her in her need. Jesus saw her as one of the countless he came to save. Jesus saw her as someone who needed to be loved, God's way, not shunned. Because of that, she saw him for who he was, a messenger of peace and her Savior.

Friends, may we **LEARN TO LOVE THE LOST** our Savior came to save. May we be far more zealous in seeking them out than we are in trying to find the remote



control. May we all grow in our love and desire to do so by continuing to be filled with God's wondrous love found in his gracious Word and boundless forgiveness, the love and forgiveness he gives to me, the love and forgiveness he gives to you. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.