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The Great Parable Series

THREE WAYS OF BEING LOST

BEING LOST

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TWO KINDS OF DISCONTENT



BELoved CENTURION:

This is the last lesson in this series. It is the deep-rooted wish and prayer of your instructor that you have found it helpful. It is a group of lessons which should be gone over again; as a matter of fact, again and again, because while the truths set forth are simple and well-known to most of us, each reading makes its imprint on our subconscious, and we will grow in character as we make of these parables and the lessons they teach us a part of our being, and use the principles in our everyday life.

It is always the simple truths which we think we know perfectly that have the greatest force for good in our lives as we put them into practice.

I doubt if there are any among us - I refer to the entire membership of the Mayan Order - who have not, at sometime or other in their lives, been tempted to explore other fields which perhaps they thought were greener than the fields close by. Some have been tempted, perhaps, to find a more exciting way of life. They have become bored or tired of the homespun, everyday things of life that seemed colorless, and have felt they should have a taste of a gayer, more colorful manner of living.

Many have found, more often, that a beautiful, worthwhile way of life was at their own doorstep. Their Mayan Companionship has helped them realize this great truth more forcefully than ever before, and that is why they are devoted to the teachings of Mayanry - because it has shown them true values, the difference between the true and the false, and the true way to happiness, peace and contentment of mind.

There are some people in this wonderful world of ours who associate religion with something that is dull, humdrum and uninteresting. As a matter of fact, there is nothing more exciting than religion, there is no greater exaltation than when we are discovering the Christian life and all its many facets of beauty and service to others. And really, not until then do we find that the real reason for much of the unhappiness which people feel in their lives is because they have never learned to think of anything else but themselves. They are constantly seeking happiness, but in the wrong direction. They are unable to see that which is close to them.

Speaking again of religion and Christian faith, we might say that it is like a great cathedral - when we stand outside and look at its painted windows, we are unable to see inside, but when we are inside of the cathedral and look at the light shining through the windows, the rays of light portray the beauty that lies within.

It is certainly a truth that cannot be disputed that we cannot be happy if we do not live for something higher than our own happiness. No one person can live within and for himself alone. We simply cannot ignore the needs of others,

whether it be spiritual, physical or mental.

So - when we are curious, as was the lost sheep, let us stop and think and look about us before running the risk of losing forever that which is near at hand, but which we felt could be found somewhere else.

Remember, too, our greatest happiness comes in sharing. I know that there are those among us who have discovered there is no more soul-satisfying happiness than that which we experience in giving ourselves in service to others. It may be a small sacrifice, maybe only a smile or some small kindness, but whatever it may be, it is the deep conviction of your instructor that service to others is our only purpose for living, and, therefore, our only real, true road to security.

THREE WAYS OF BEING LOST. Luke 15;4-32.

BEING LOST

THE fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke is a collection of longer parables dealing with a necessary theme - being lost. In all harvestings, in every enterprise, and every operation, there is a percentage of loss. The same applies in the building of the kingdom of heaven in our personal lives and in the world life.

There are three of these parables - that of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. If these have been just three more Bible stories to you, let us hope that after this lesson they will have very definite and everyday meanings for you.

Being lost and being saved are very familiar terms not only among religious people and Bible students but among business men, military men, farmers, and others. We hope to show here that in whatever category we find it the term "being lost" has the same meaning, exactly what it says. It is not a matter of what one thinks, or feels, or belongs to. Being lost is being lost.

Being lost is being misplaced, being incapacitated, not knowing the way, or being in such a condition that value is destroyed. Whether it is money, property, happiness, ability, character, or life itself, it is something that has to be entered on the ledger in red ink. It is a debit, and has to be subtracted from the success of whatever is involved. Loss cancels profit, in whatever terms it may be.

Jesus knew exactly what being lost means and how many different things it can mean. He never spoke on the subject in vague or uncertain terms. To him and to those who understood his message being lost meant exactly that, and he was trying to make sure it would be the same with us. Anything that is lost needs to be found and rescued, even though it takes effort; and when it is found, if it is found, there is occasion for rejoicing.

Here again we find what a supreme story teller Jesus was. Aesop told stories with a point, but Jesus told stories with immortal life meanings. His

parables probed the depths of human experience. On this day his mind was evidently on the tragic matter of getting lost, on the loss of that greatest of earthly values, a human being. Before he was through he had opened up three of the terrifying possibilities of it and turned the light of truth into their dark and cavernous depths.

The first of the three stories is about a sheep that was lost because its curiosity led it astray. The second is about a coin that was lost because it was not at work. The third is about a boy who was lost because he was mistaken about what the good life is. They are all famous stories, but they all mean more than is usually supposed. We shall search for those meanings a little later.

The important reason for thinking about loss is that it suggests ways of avoiding it and turning it into gain. When we see how things get lost, that should throw light on how they may be found and how others like them may be kept from getting lost. Jesus did not tell these stories to open the gates of sorrow and distress, but to point the way to hope. Let us examine them in the same spirit and for the same purpose.

LOST THROUGH CURIOSITY. LUKE 15; 4-7

THE parable of the lost sheep is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. Of a flock of a hundred sheep ninety-nine stayed under the shepherd's care and guidance, but one was not content with that. One in a hundred is not a high percentage, but any percentage of lost life is tragic.

The tragedy here is all the greater because the reason for the sheep's straying was so empty and needless. Yet it is a common reason for strayings, especially among the young whose ambitions spill over the walls of the fold of safety and usefulness. This is repeated with each generation. We never seem to learn.

This sheep got bored with seeing the same old flock and the same old shepherd in the same old fields day after day. Surely there must be something more challenging than the unchanging routine of such a life. Surely there must be more interesting conditions and associates elsewhere.

The grass looked greener in every other valley than the one where it was. The rocky hills looked more interesting. Why not try them too? So the reckless sheep was lured farther and farther, drawn by its curiosity to see more and more that was different. In time it found it no longer knew the way back. Its trouble had been that it was ignorant of life, and took the wrong way of finding out what things are all about. How many human sheep get lost the same way!

One of the meanings of the Garden of Eden story is that transgression and spiritual ruin began with mere curiosity. How would a forbidden experience represented by an apple, the fruit of the tree of knowledge, taste? "If I do not taste it I will never know", says the silent voice of curiosity. "Of course you won't" smiles the venomous one. Soon the victim is on the outside of the garden of innocence looking in. But he cannot re-enter. The gate of the yesterdays is kept by an angel with a flaming sword.

"If I should remove myself from this so-called good environment and try to find one that is more interesting, what would really happen?" whispers the voice of curiosity to the one now safe with the shepherd. "Nothing at all", says the venomous one. "These stories of dire consequences are old wives' tales. It is perfectly safe. Try it. Live fully, daringly, dangerously. Why should things be so dull?" Those who have tried it have found what is likely to happen, and they do not like it.

If you stay where God has placed you, you will not get lost on the hillside with your heart all torn by the thorns. If you keep your curiosity harnessed to the task of finding out only what is worthwhile, constructive, and wise, you will not get lost among the detours and by-paths of life. Better be thrilled by what is good, and true, and helpful, then you will be less likely to become a lost sheep.

OUT OF ADJUSTMENT

THE lost sheep was led by curiosity out of the relationship in which its life could count for something into one where it could not be worth anything to itself or to others. It sought for novelty and found it, but it also found that not all novelty is desirable.

It was the old story of the fields that looked so inviting turning out to be overgrown with briars and thorns. A situation like that is very easy to create, but it is not so easy to correct. This sheep was bound and brought back, for it is a sheep in a story; but in the stern drama of real life many never are.

The situation in which life, probably with your own cooperation, has placed you may seem humdrum, but if it is productive of any real values it is good. We seldom gain by moving and changing about. Too much of such efforts is spent toiling across desert reaches to get to oases that are not there.

The place where we can do most that is worthwhile is the best place. It may be the place where we are, but if not doing well in the place where we are is probably the surest way to find out. We need to make very sure that the cool grove of palms ahead is not a mirage, but a fact.

Life is co-operative. We are sometimes tempted to rebel against the order of things where we are and go on our own, but many do it to their regret. They discover after they are lost among the rocks and brambles that the old situation was not so bad after all. The old home, for instance, had one thing the rocky hills do not provide - love.

A wise man used to say, "I am not afraid to go anywhere God leads me, but I am afraid to go anywhere He does not lead me." Change is sometimes best, but it should be impelled by something more than the prodding of curiosity or the mere desire for change for its own sake. It is not wise to go wandering around looking for greener pastures, for what you see may be the foliage of thorn trees. Anyway, you are losing time. Aimless search seldom finds anything worth while, and rebellious wandering never does.

Probably being out of place in the pattern of life is always our own

fault. We are in the wrong place, or in no place at all, because we scorned the right one. Age spends many a chimney corner hour thinking regretfully over the times when exactly this has happened.

How would it be out of the restraints and humdrum days of the fold? You do not know, and when you learn by experience that it is not what you had thought it would be, it may be late to help matters.

If you have got out of adjustment, try to get back again before it is too late. If you have not made this mistake, guard against it. Count your blessings where you are. Be very sure about other fields that seem inviting and other relationships that may be promising more than they will fulfill.

Consider how much your home field really has for you, what compensations there are in your work, and how valuable are the loved ones and friends you would have to forsake. If you ever do change folds, situations, conditions, do so thoughtfully, prayerfully, and with good will to all concerned.

But do not let the voice of curiosity tell you what to do. The shepherd might not find you on the hills, however he might try

THE LOST COIN. LUKE 15; 8-10.

THE story of the lost coin is a poignant one. The loss of money can be very tragic if the loser is poor and dependent on it for subsistence or for the fulfillment of some great need or long-cherished dream he may have.

Presumably the woman in the story did not have much money, or she would not have been taking such exacting care of the small store or have been so distressed at the falling from her hand of a single piece. So it meant all the more to her when, probably as she was counting it over and looking at the pieces as people will do to whom such possessions are rather rare, one coin slipped from her fingers.

We can visualize the scene. The coin, with an apparent mischievousness, falls on its edge and goes rolling away like a live thing. Where? Into the dimmest shadow and beyond it to a restingplace under or behind some piece of furniture in a concealed and perhaps inaccessible place. You know how it is.

Then comes the anxious search by one who cannot afford the loss and who perhaps already sees the vanishing of some dreamed of purchase, payment, or satisfaction. She lights a candle, and sweeps the floor, and after awhile the broom flips the lost out of hiding into view.

Then the fear departs, and everything is all right again. It is an occasion for rejoicing and a time for her friends to rejoice with her. So she calls the neighbors and they celebrate together. All this is to show how much the coin meant to her, and thus how much we mean to the Maker who has put us into the stream of life to function for Him. The purchasing power of the lost coin is restored. Now its intrinsic value which meant nothing in hiding has become real again. In each of the three parables this element of rejoicing appears to

remind us that when we get lost the Father sorrows, and when we are found again there is joy among the angels.

Jesus does not emphasize all the pathos possible here. He is too much of a master story teller for that. He sketches the action, and leaves it to the reader to see the dramatic forces rise before him and feel them sweep through his own being as he identifies himself with the lost coin.

OUT OF CIRCULATION

YOU see, the whole trouble with the coin was that it was out of circulation. It was a perfectly good coin, but it was no good to anyone when it was not in action. The people of the richest country in the world can starve to death if its purchasing power is not in action. A coin or a person is valueless when not in circulation.

In our country, if all the money were divided equally among us no one would have more than enough to live on a few days. But we live and make progress because circulation keeps a much larger part of the national wealth within our reach for use as it passes through our hands, renewing all its purchasing power every time it changes hands.

Each of a dozen men may owe one of the others a dollar. If one and only one of them has a dollar he can pay the man he owes, and the second man may pay the one he owes, and so on till each man has paid the dollar he owes to another. Thus, though there was only one dollar in the group, twelve dollars of indebtedness have been paid with it - by keeping it in circulation. This, and not hoarding, is the secret of the economic well-being of a people.

It was a great day when Doctor Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood in the body, and it was one of nature's most amazing marvels that he found. The circulatory system is one of arteries, veins, and capillaries so small that the corpuscles have to pass through them in single file. You can take some of the thin membranes and see through them almost like they were glass, yet they are full of these microscopic blood vessels. The blood, a stream of floating corpuscles like little coins, is sent out fresh through the arterial system carrying supplies for feeding and repair. It sweeps the body of impurities and comes back through the veins so laden with them that the red has turned to blue. Then it is passed through the lungs, oxygenated, and started on its eight-minute journey through the body again, the whole pumping system centering in that tireless servant, the heart. The heart in turn is activated for each beat by an electric impulse from a little storage battery called the Bundle of Hiss.

If anything goes wrong with the process illness results. If it stops and is not quickly restored death results. A human being is like a coin in the stream of purchasing power. He is also like a corpuscle in the blood stream. Both carry supply and render service, and keep doing it over and over all the time.

That is how important it is that we keep moving in the organized life of the world, making our contributions to that life steady and constant. If we get out of circulation we are lost unless we are found and restored to it by someone in some way. God is like the woman searching with candle and broom as long as

there is hope.

Your life and its service have a value to others, to the world, and to the ages; but that value depends on keeping in circulation. If you get hidden in a corner your usefulness and the satisfaction of being useful cease as long as you lie there.

Have an aim and purpose in life, then. Do not drift among the world's misfits. To do so is to rob Destiny, and therefore yourself. Keep in circulation by making the most of your life where you are and while you can. A coin rolling across the floor seems like a living thing, and a life running from duty is a living thing. We are therefore responsible ourselves if we become lost coins.

THE LOST BOY. LUKE 15; 11-32

WE come to the third of the cluster of great parables, the one which is the more appealing and understandable because the central character is a person. He is the kind of a person who gets lost very easily because he has the thrill of youth in his body and its restlessness in his mind. He is the kind of a person who can quickly and easily become either a hero or a wreck. Such people, usually in youth, get lost because they get mistaken notions of what the good life is and go searching for the wrong thing.

All it takes to make a wreck is a general disapproval of everything and a general dissatisfaction with one's situation, be it ever so good. People are stuffy, home life is dull, the family is behind the times, and so on. People elsewhere are more interesting. Other places are more attractive. More money can be made somewhere else. There life is exciting and glamorous - and that is the thing.

The young man wants to learn life for himself, not be told or have someone else trying to live his life for him. He has no respect for the past anyway. The present is all that counts. He has a right to make his own mistakes, and not have others forever warning him of what has happened in days gone by. Things are different now. The old ideas no longer apply.

So he goes with his share of the property and his father's reluctant blessing. He does not stop till he has reached a far country, for he wants to put as much distance as possible between himself and the former order of things. Now he is free. Now he will really do some living.

But he finds that his new freedom is not freedom at all. He is free from the home environment but he is in the grip of something far worse. High living is eating up his resources and fastening upon him habits that make it sure the rest will be consumed together with all his hope of peace and happiness.

In the course of time he is feeding swine, and envying them their husks. That is the tragic stage in the life of exile, the time when one knows that now he cannot go home and face those he has scorned. He is too poor to pay his way, and he is too ashamed to face the family with his pitiful and sordid story of failure. But at last he struggles home on the weary feet of a pauper and a begger. No explaining is necessary. The father understands and forgives without

being asked. His elder brother looks on his welcome with jealous eyes, but it is home. How could he ever have despised its love, and peace, and protection?

It is fortunate for those who have become dissatisfied with home and loved ones that the same road that leads away also leads back. Ignorance led the prodigal away but understanding, dearly paid for, leads him over the same road back. Fortunate are those who are willing to see without learning the hard way that there are harsher chains than those of love, and that so-called freedom is often bondage with a mask.

There is a road back from failure to earnest effort and success. There is a road back from false and evil influences to wholesome and constructive ones. There is a road back from every alien land to the welcome home of friends and loved ones. There is a road back from wilfulness and error to the feet of God.

TWO KINDS OF DISCONTENT

IN closing this lesson and this series of lessons, let us pause and look comparatively at the two brothers, the elder and the younger. Many people have criticised the prodigal's elder brother for showing jealousy of the affection shown the returning wastrel when it had never been shown him who had tried to deserve it. However you may think of him, the fact remains that he had done well.

He had a point. He had remained loyally at home, and worked hard, and made himself an honorable place in the family and the community, while his younger brother, full of mistaken notions, impatient of the time required to make advancement, and envious of the steadier one's success, had smashed the structure of the life he was living and gone rashly and impetuously out to seek something different. However you may pity him, he had acted very foolishly.

These two young men represent as many kinds of discontent which we may well consider before we close. Every person should make a careful comparison between them, for one has the makings of success and the other of ruin.

There is a constructive discontent with things as they are, in favor of things as they ought to be. It is a divine thing and always constructive. It actuated the progress of creation, and has motivated all the progress of the human race from savagery on the long road to the Kingdom. It impels one not to be satisfied with anything till it is good as he can make it, not to be complacent about conditions but to labor patiently and loyally to improve them. All progress would stop if everyone were satisfied with everything.

The prodigal son had quite a different kind of discontent. IT WAS DESTRUCTIVE. It was little more than impatience. Feeling that things were not to his liking, he did not trouble to consider why, or how, or what to do about them. His impulse was only to toss them aside and leave.

That improved nothing, but only brought about the loss of what he already had. Even if something needs improving, it is never improved in this fashion.

Rashness is a road that surely leads from the status of the heir to that of the prodigal.

If you are satisfied with conditions, your achievements, yourself, that is as far as you will ever get with them unless you become constructively dissatisfied. If you are dissatisfied with these things, NEVER LET YOUR DISSATISFACTION TAKE THE FORM OF RECKLESSNESS.

Look at your life, your work, your progress, your character, and see what improvements ARE NEEDED. Proceed patiently to make those improvements. By the time you have done that you will doubtless see how you can do better still. The elder brother had surely had his moments of discontent too, but they impelled him to upbuild his situation, not to throw it away. The elder brother learned the laborious way. The prodigal learned the costly way. The meaning for you and for each of us is clear.

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Let us repeat the prayer and make it come from deep within our hearts:

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, forbid that I should get lost among the tangles of life or stray upon the hills of peril or the by-paths of confusion. May every wanderer this day be found and restored to usefulness, happiness, and peace. Amen.

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May God Bless You,

YOUR CLASS INSTRUCTOR

Your next lesson will begin a new and important series. Be prepared to receive it.

