

Today's story is familiar to us. These are well-known "twin" parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin.

Loss is an inevitable part of life. There is the loss of a loved one, the loss of health, or the letting go of a long-held dream. Also, we experience the loss of leaving home, the loss of a job, or the loss of financial security. We know how hard it is to understand and accept these losses. Even in our faith journey, we encounter the moment where we lost our faith. We lost peace of mind with worries. Sometimes, we doubt God's presence in our life. We can be lost in unbelief.

Here is the good news. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost in the world. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Today's parables were given to sinners and tax collectors. They knew that they were lost and outside of the covenant of God. They were coming near to listen to Jesus.

However, there are the Pharisees and the scribes who were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." They also were lost, but they were unaware of where they were in the kingdom of God. What is sad is that many Christians are in this condition. Theologian, Jack Shea says, even the ninety-nine were lost in some way. Even when we appear to be a part of the flock, and sit in church on Sunday morning, we used to find that we are lost in some way and need to be found.

Also, Jesus talked about a widow who had ten silver coins. Each of the coins was worth a day's wages. The woman counted her coins, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Oh no! I have lost one of my coins," she cried. When she

loses one coin, she does not say, "Well, I still have nine others, that will just have to do." To a widow, in that culture, one coin could feed her family for a week; it had far more value than coins are today. So what did the widow do? She turned her house upside down until she found that one lost coin. She turned on every light in the house, swept the floor, and searched until she found the lost coin. And then she called all her neighbors to come to celebrate because she had found the coin.

Now, these stories are given to us who come to the Oakfield Church and listen to the word of God. This parable is not only about the redemption of the "lost," but also about the "already found." We once were lost, but now we are found.

Do you know what it feels like to be carried? Do you know what it feels like to be found? After your life has been empty, after your heart has been broken, after your soul has been shattered, do you know what it's like to feel the arms of our loving God around you, lifting you up?

Luke wrote, "And when he finds the lost sheep, he puts it on his shoulders with great joy" and said 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' In the other parable, after she has found it, the woman calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'

A great joy! Every aspect of the story is laced with joy. As Jesus told the story, He must have been exhibiting that joy. Jesus not only emphasizes joy, but he expects to rejoice, an expression of the true joy.

Do you rejoice with Jesus Christ today? If you lose your joy in Jesus, you could be in spiritual danger. Paul says Philippians 3:1, "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you." Paul reminds them to rejoice because it is safe.

In the early days of coal mining, they found an effective, low-tech solution: They brought canaries into the mines. A canary's metabolism is very sensitive to air quality. As long as the bright yellow birds chirp and sing, miners know the air is safe. If gas levels rise, the canaries stop singing, wobble on their perch, and eventually fall to the floor of the cage.

Christian joy is like that singing, yellow bird. When your heart stops singing, that is a warning to watch your life. If your soul is satisfied in Christ, you will rejoice in Christ. Take your eyes off Christ, and you'll lose your joy. Christian joy is a barometer of your spiritual life.

Don't confuse this unique joy with other upbeat feelings. Genuine Christian joy is not the power of positive thinking. Joy is not being happy because life is going my way.

George Müller was an evangelist and orphanage director in Bristol, England. He is famous for his tremendous faith and amazingly effective ministry — he cared for over 10,000 orphans over the course of his life. And joy was Müller's first priority each day. He said,

"The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how the inner life might be nourished." Working hard for Jesus, even caring for thousands of orphans is a cold

and empty duty if we have lost the warmth of our love for Christ. Joy is to see, know, love, and trust Jesus Christ.

How do we keep rejoicing in the Lord?

First of all, Remember that God gave you a new identity. 1 John 3:1 says, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." You have a new identity in God. Old things have passed away. Behold, the new has come! You are under covenant with God. You are children of God.

Secondly, Remember that God's hand is upon you. Why should Christians fear when we're in God's hands, the creator of the universe? He will guide you through every tough situation and direct you on the right path. Even though we might not understand the moving hand of God, God is working for us. We will understand how God takes care of us later.

Thirdly, Remember that God has a plan for us. God promises in Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." So you can have confidence that your future is in the Lord's plan.

Christian joy is the great pleasure and happiness that we feel whether or not the sun is shining, whether or not our Green Bay Packers is winning, whether or not we are healthy or hurting, because God gives us a new identity, because God's hand is upon us, because God has the plan for us.

I want to close my sermon with Habakkuk 3:17-18, the prophet Habakkuk says, Even though the fig trees have no fruit and no grapes grow on the vines, even though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no grain,

even though the sheep all die and the cattle stalls are empty, ¹⁸I will still be joyful and glad, because the LORD God is my savior.

Loving God, remind us that we are here because you invite us, seek us, come to us, and embrace us. We are here because as a shepherd seeks a lost sheep, you seek us when we are lost. As a woman searches for a lost coin, you rejoice when we are found. Teach us to give thanks. Amen.