

Lessons from Lost Things

Luke 15

The three great enemies of the Christian life are the world, the flesh, and the Devil. 1 John 2:15-17 speak to the first enemy, the world: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." The "world" is that which is confined to this life as opposed to that which reaches beyond this life and into eternity. The world is represented by those things that are described as wood, hay, stubble, the things that will burn in the judgment. The prevailing opinions held in any culture that is not founded on a belief in the scriptures as the Word of God will represent the world. These opinions represent the values of the culture and always seek to achieve conformity. You are accepted by the world when you are like the world. Since the world is only concerned with the here and now and since God is eternal and calls us to value most the blessings of eternal life, the world is always the polar opposite of God. You cannot love the world and love God. You will have to choose. To whatever extent the world possesses your heart, it will have stolen that affection from God because He is the One to whom it rightfully belongs. Matt. 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The second of the great enemies is the flesh. The flesh is a word that describes our bodies in their present condition, having been corrupted by sin. What this means is that our bodies always seek self indulgence to our own detriment. Left to ourselves we will always end up out of balance and in the way of our own betterment. All of the addictions that trouble so many people are trouble with the flesh. And the problem is that your flesh is so closely associated with yourself that even when you try to resist the destructive impulses of the flesh, you do so in

the flesh with the inevitable consequence of failure. Romans 7:18-20, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil that I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwells in me." Since we are so thoroughly corrupted by sin, the remedy for our situation, the escape from our enslavement to sin in the flesh must be found in God as it is impossible for us to save ourselves. Romans 8:5, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." If my problem in my life is that I eat too much and I resolve then to eat less then nothing changes because both before and after I resolved to change I found myself thinking about nothing but food. To set your mind on the Spirit is to replace your focus on the flesh with a focus on the Lord and all the blessings He gives. This frees you from the power of the flesh and opens the way to an entirely new experience of victory and transformation.

The third enemy is the Devil Himself. He is the tempter and the deceiver who is always out to destroy us. Think about Eve in the garden. The serpent argued that God was trying to keep her from the knowledge of good and evil as if this made Him her enemy while he was persuading her to eat the fruit that would bring about her death and that would have her thrown out of the garden. God wants to bless and the devil always wants to destroy. He will seek to make you feel deprived and then he will put in front of you a resolution of your sense of need but his solution will always require you to compromise your principles in some way. He will try to make you feel as if his solution is really your only reasonable option and he will also make you feel as if no one will ever find out about your choices anyway. When you begin to believe him all of your objections will melt away and you will fall into his trap.

Jesus' call to discipleship addressed these three great enemies. Luke 9:23, "... if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." When we deny ourselves we reject the impulses of the flesh and practice the disciplines Jesus taught such as prayer and almsgiving and fasting in the way that Jesus taught us to practice them which is for the Lord and

not for men. To take up your cross daily is to be motivated by the eternal on a daily basis. The world mocks cross carriers. It sees no value in such useless sacrifice. Why waste your time by feeding the homeless? If they wanted to better themselves then they would. Following Jesus is the alternative to the influence and temptations of the Devil. When you are with Him you will know that you are where you belong. He will protect you from the devil's devices. Your satisfactions will reveal the lie in the devil's propaganda.

Paul spoke to the three enemies of the Christian life in one concise statement. "And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." The life controlled by the world, the flesh and the Devil is where we all begin. The Ephesian believers were like all other believers in Christ, those whom He had made alive who were once dead in their trespasses and sins. Christ's objective is to set us free from the influence of these three enemies but He begins His work with a house that is filled with all of the old furniture. Paul would later challenge the Ephesians, "If indeed you have heard Him and been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

Jesus also warned of the three great enemies when he answered the criticisms of the Pharisees with His three stories about lost things. Jesus did not befriend the tax-collectors and sinners because he approved of them but because He sought to help them and to set them free. Being lost is not an acceptable state of being. The confession, "I'm lost." is a cry for help. If you are lost it is for a reason. It did not just happen. Lostness is a condition that has a cause or causes. And so Jesus told a story about a lost sheep. But how does a sheep get lost? Isn't it true that sheep become distracted by stimulus outside of themselves? A butterfly floats by and the little lamb chases it until it disappears. Then, it notices some pretty

flowers and thinks of how they might taste and so she munches on them for a little snack. One thing leads to another and soon the lamb has been separated from mother and flock and has no idea of where they are. The wandering lamb is a picture of the believer who falls under the spell of the world's attractions. One thing leads to another and soon, the Christian has lost her way.

The second story is that of the lost coin. Coins do not lose themselves but we lose our coins when we neglect to pay attention to what we are doing. If you know that you have a hole in your pocket, why would you put your treasured coin in that pocket? If you always put your coins in a particular place then why set them down elsewhere? The lost coin represents the enemy of the flesh. It is our flesh that is the root of our spiritual carelessness.

The third story is the lost son. It is a story of the boy's rebellion. The devil is the one who is behind rebellion. He was the first rebel and he is the inspiration for all rebels. To rebel you have to be dissatisfied. You have been treated badly. The way to feel better is to reject your parent and to violate their values and to make your own rules. Of course, you actually harm yourself more than any other.

The world the flesh and the devil. These are your enemies. Look out!!