

# BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

## EXPOSITORY SERMON

JULY 2015

E Mail

[PKBedwell@hotmail.com](mailto:PKBedwell@hotmail.com)

WEB PAGE

[Bedwellglobalministries.com](http://Bedwellglobalministries.com)

REVISED AND CORRECTED COPY.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INSIGNIFICANT

Scripture Reading – Luke 15:1-7

Scripture Background - Luke 15:1-31

#### Introduction

The fifteenth chapter of Luke has been called the Gospel within the gospel. Three parables of lost things are told but as some see it, the three parables are really one story with three parts. There is a common theme with which Jesus is concerned. In the parable of the sheep, the sheep was helplessly lost and after painful and dangerous efforts by the shepherd it was found. The parable of the coin describes how the coin was carelessly lost and after a diligent search it was found. The prodigal son, however, lost himself by willful choices and it took the unconditional love of a father's heart of love to draw him home in order to restore and bring about reconciliation to the Father's house. The sheep was the object of compassion! "The coin was the object of value! The son was the object of love!" The purpose of these parables of lost things is to show how God views those who are lost to His grace. The common thread that runs through the parables emphasizes and emphasizes the significance of the insignificant. One coin! One sheep! One son! So why bother with them? It did not seem as though the loss was great. But the message is that this is not the God way thinks, for it is clear that Jesus wants to impress us of the value of one soul. The message is that no

matter how lost one soul is, he is worth saving. Jesus said that there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

These amazing words give us insight into heart of God. It is He who takes the initiative to save the lost. The radical religious leaders of that day had never portrayed God in this way. The message of the parable speaks of the significance of the insignificant. When we consider how small we are in comparison to the vastness of our universe, these words may surprise and even startle us. There is so much in our day that makes us feel that we are insignificant. In an era when, even in the church, we are obsessed with largeness, the masses and the crowds, the message still comes through to us from the word that heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. Now what does this say to us? It says that, while in many circles a person may be considered to be a number, insignificant and small; that in the sight of God, the reverse is true because the population of heaven celebrates when one sinner repents. A sinner who, maybe not even be noticed in our society, and even possibly rejected and despised; God regards as significant. He sees him as a person infinitely more precious than gold. So much so that Jesus said that it would be not be profitable if a person gained the whole world yet lost his soul. And Jesus did not say what the status of the soul had to be, in order to be of more value than the all of the world and its treasure. In other words Jesus did not say the soul had to be a member of the elite or affluent to have a soul of such value. It is not things or status that gives a soul its value! The wealth a soul possesses does not increase the value of his soul. The soul is of value because in the beginning God breathed the breath of life into him and he became a living never dying soul. He possesses the quality of immortality. He is created in the image of God. Furthermore sin may defile a soul but it will never devalue it. Jesus regarded a soul of incalculable worth regardless of its condition of because He died for it. It is not what a soul has that is of value, but who a soul is. No matter how lost the soul is, no matter how degraded he may have become, no matter how heavy the load of guilt he carries, he is still of more value than the whole world and its wealth. It is clear

then, that if a soul is of such great worth, we will understand why Jesus would search for it. In this way, Jesus draws back the curtains and gives us insight into how God regards a lost soul. Heaven rejoices when ONE soul repents. It is clear that these parables have something to say to us about the church's mission in the world. They outline how we are to reach out to those who need the Lord Jesus Christ. The parable of the lost sheep has a lot to say to us about our mission in the world. They teach us that there are fundamental principles which Jesus exemplifies as vital to reaching the lost. Notice

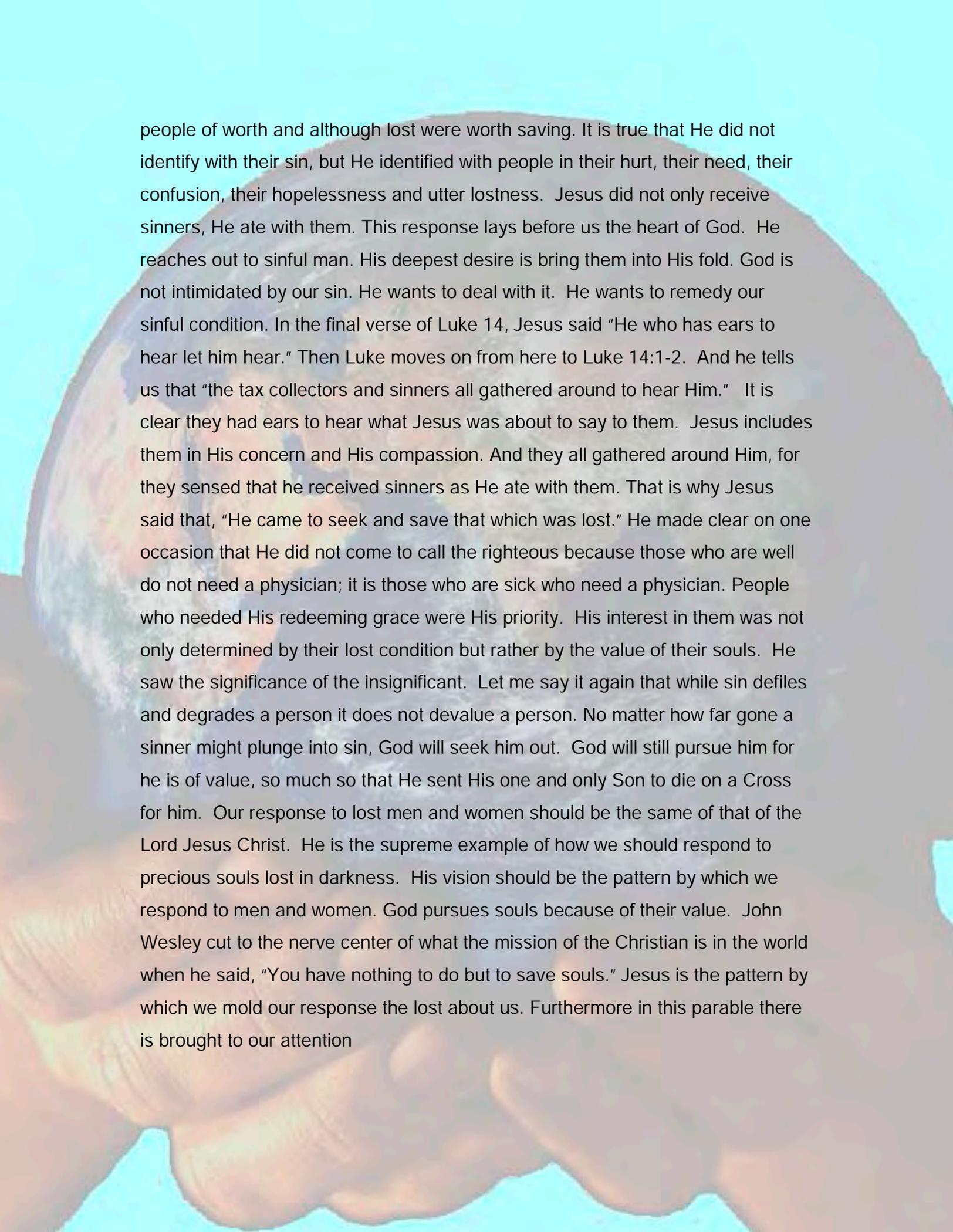
**1. THE PATTERN BY WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MUST SEEK THE LOST. Luke**

**15:1-2.** The story gives us guidance as to how we are to respond to those who need Christ. Jesus Himself is the supreme example of how we are to respond. He once said "As the Father has sent me so send I you." Who Jesus is, and what He does, and how He does it, is the pattern laid down for us in our quest for souls. How do we respond to those with whom we come into contact where we live? There are two types of responses we could follow. Firstly note,

**a. What we should avoid. Luke 15:1-2.** This response is evident in the religious leaders - the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law - who in fact were the shepherds of the people. In verse 1 we read, "The tax collectors and the sinners were gathered together around Jesus to hear what He had to say." The religious leaders stood there stiff-necked, self-righteous and proud and muttered, "This man," referring to Jesus, "welcomes sinners and eats with them." This man welcomes sinners. This is the main message of this parable. This is why Jesus came to this world. To welcome sinners into His fold! This statement was not meant to be a compliment but a criticism. But this criticism, meant to be destructive, in reality revealed the attitude of Jesus to a lost sinner for He did come to welcome sinners. The people who were regarded as sinners were labeled in an unflattering way by the Pharisees as the **"The people of the Land."** They believed that association with these people would defile them. A strict Pharisee was forbidden to be the guest of any such man, or to have him as a guest. They were even forbidden, as far as possible, to have any business dealings with them, or

to buy anything from him or sell anything to him. It was a deliberate Pharisaic aim to avoid every contact with the "people of the land," - people who did not observe the petty details of the law. Obviously they would be shocked to the core at the way Jesus companied with people who were rank outsiders, sinners, and whose contact with them would necessarily defile him so they thought. We will understand these parables more fully if we remember that the strict Jew would not say, "There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents," but, as scholars have told us "There is joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God. They sadistically looked forward not to the saving of a soul but the destruction of the sinner. This attitude did not come from the heart of God, but it was one they had cultivated and developed in their own minds. They were more concerned about their pseudo- righteousness, their petty rules than they were lost hurting people. Their response is not designed to win the lost to Christ. To gather their robes about them and mutter, with a critical spirit "this man welcomes sinners and eats with them," is not part of the Gospel of God. The question is "How can we bring hope, healing and grace to lost people, if you hold to this false mindset?" How can you touch people with the love of Christ, if we divorce ourselves from them?" Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them." It is an important observation the religious leaders made about Jesus that "He welcomes sinners and eats with them." We are to avoid the attitude of the religious leaders. But there is something else here for Jesus teaches

**b. How We Should Respond. Luke 15:1-2.** It is stated simply yet so profoundly, "this Man welcomes sinners and eats with them." This was the response of Jesus. He actively sought out sinners with the intent of bringing them to Himself. While the Rabbis agreed that that God would welcome the repentant sinner. But that God is a seeking God is a new and revolutionary idea. A God who takes the initiative to seek out and reclaim a sinner was strange to their thinking. The prevalent attitude of that day in Judaism was isolationism or detachment from the sinner. It is clear that the response of Jesus to the sinner was different. It was counter to traditional religion. Jesus concentrated on identifying with them as

A background image showing a hand holding a globe of the Earth. The hand is positioned at the bottom, with fingers wrapped around the globe. The globe is centered in the upper half of the image, showing the Americas. The overall tone is warm and spiritual, with a soft, glowing light effect around the globe.

people of worth and although lost were worth saving. It is true that He did not identify with their sin, but He identified with people in their hurt, their need, their confusion, their hopelessness and utter lostness. Jesus did not only receive sinners, He ate with them. This response lays before us the heart of God. He reaches out to sinful man. His deepest desire is bring them into His fold. God is not intimidated by our sin. He wants to deal with it. He wants to remedy our sinful condition. In the final verse of Luke 14, Jesus said "He who has ears to hear let him hear." Then Luke moves on from here to Luke 14:1-2. And he tells us that "the tax collectors and sinners all gathered around to hear Him." It is clear they had ears to hear what Jesus was about to say to them. Jesus includes them in His concern and His compassion. And they all gathered around Him, for they sensed that he received sinners as He ate with them. That is why Jesus said that, "He came to seek and save that which was lost." He made clear on one occasion that He did not come to call the righteous because those who are well do not need a physician; it is those who are sick who need a physician. People who needed His redeeming grace were His priority. His interest in them was not only determined by their lost condition but rather by the value of their souls. He saw the significance of the insignificant. Let me say it again that while sin defiles and degrades a person it does not devalue a person. No matter how far gone a sinner might plunge into sin, God will seek him out. God will still pursue him for he is of value, so much so that He sent His one and only Son to die on a Cross for him. Our response to lost men and women should be the same of that of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the supreme example of how we should respond to precious souls lost in darkness. His vision should be the pattern by which we respond to men and women. God pursues souls because of their value. John Wesley cut to the nerve center of what the mission of the Christian is in the world when he said, "You have nothing to do but to save souls." Jesus is the pattern by which we mold our response the lost about us. Furthermore in this parable there is brought to our attention

## 2. THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN WHICH IS TO REACH LOST SOULS.

**Luke 15:4.** Jesus said "suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does He not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? Jesus is telling us that to fulfill that purpose the Christian is to carry,

**a. The Responsibility of this Mission to the Lost World. Luke 15:4.** If a man loses one of his sheep.... he goes after the lost sheep until he find it." The key words here are "he goes after the lost sheep....." Jesus makes this statement as a matter of accepted fact. Lost sheep implies that they need to be sought after and found. LOST SHEEP! These words clarify and bring into focus the mission of the church. God has saved us is that we should take the initiative and reach out to bring others to Him. Most in our society do not recognize that they are lost or they refuse to admit it. They think that because they are advanced technologically and scientifically that they are not lost. While it is true that they maybe giants in the technological world, they are but dwarfs morally and spiritually. Like the man who found an African wandering aimlessly in the bush and asked, "Are you lost?" The African replied, "No! I am not lost. My hut is lost. He was too proud to admit that he was lost. Our society may not admit that it is lost, but lost it is the sight of God. It is a society that has lost its compass. A society where the demarcation between right and wrong has disappeared in the fog of permissiveness and where the only sign post to moral living is how we feel about it. And so we do what seems right in our own eyes. And while our world may not admit it is lost – it is lost. It is like a ship with a rudder. It is sailing but it has no idea where it is going. Arthur J. Holt said "man is lost when he cannot define his present and plan his future." As we look about us and see what is happening in this present age, an age which is somewhat difficult to define. And if we cannot define it in the present, it is impossible to plan for the future." It was Arlington Robinson who said, "I cannot find my way: there is no star, in all the shrouded heavens anywhere." 'All my life," said Seneca, "I have been seeking to climb out of the pit of my besetting sins and I cannot do it, and I never will,

UNLESS a hand is let down to draw me up.” Robinson wrote that “the world is a kind of spiritual kindergarten where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks.” What does this mean for us? Are we to simply watch the world go by on its way to hell? Are we to be discouraged by it all and ultimately defeated by it all. Are we to conclude that the lostness of our world is too big for us to handle. There is no doubt it is a daunting task. Nevertheless I believe that this is not a day for ringing our hands. It is not a day for retreat or pessimism. One has written “God is looking for people whom through He can do the impossible. What a pity that we plan only those things that we can do by ourselves.” Do we think that God would send His one and only Son if the task of reaching the lost was impossible? This is the day of responsibility and opportunity. God lays the responsibility of reaching the lost at our feet. This underlines the importance of this challenge. With God’s help it is time for us to say to a lost world that there is a way out the darkness of guilt and sin to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ there is a living hope in a hopeless world. Jesus said we are the light of the world and we are to shine in the darkness about us. We are commissioned to bring people to the light. A church should never forget that she “exists for those who aren’t here yet.” She exists to fill the empty pews. Tied together with this responsibility to show people the way is the need for

**b. Fidelity to the commission given by the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 15:4.** Jesus said, “The shepherd goes after that one sheep, “UNTIL,” He finds it. The word “UNTIL” implies faithfulness to His task as the shepherd. Mark Hatfield tells of touring Calcutta with Mother Teresa and visiting the so-called “House of the Dying,” where sick children are cared for in their last days, and the dispensary, where the poor line up by the hundreds to receive medical attention. Watching Mother Teresa minister to these people, feeding and nursing those left by others to die, Hatfield was over whelmed by the sheer magnitude of the suffering she and her co-workers faced daily. “How can you bear the load without being crushed by it?” he asked. Mother Teresa replied, “My dear senator, I am not

called to be successful, I am called to be faithful." It was Harold Bosby who said that "God seeks all men through love and never gives up on any one." Jesus says that the shepherd goes seeking the lost sheep "UNTIL" he finds it." This parable also highlights

### **3. THE PERSISTENCE NEEDED BY THE CHURCH IN THE SEARCH OF SOULS. Luke 12:4.**

"The shepherd goes after the sheep until he finds it. The key word here is "UNTIL" When he finds it he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home." He searches for the lost sheep until he finds it. The words "until he finds it" indicate a determined and persistence search for it. The fainthearted will never reach the lost. Before I left Swaziland as a young man to begin my preparation for the ministry, I used to accompany the Bible College students as they went across the bushveld area to preach under trees and out in the bush. We would get up at five a.m. on a Sunday morning and drive out into the bush and have as many services as we could. We would end up having anywhere from three to five services on the Lord's Day. Each of us would take our turn at preaching. After I had spoken at one tree church, with the drums beating in the village and various domestic animals making their distinctive noises ranging from hens clucking as they proudly announced they had laid eggs, to bellowing bulls and bleating goats, we invited people to accept Christ. The service had been difficult. No one responded, but at the back of the congregation a dignified Swazi gentleman stood to his feet dressed in his traditional clothes. He asked if he could say something and we agreed. He said something like this. You have noticed that no one responded to the message. In our culture if we want to break a rock we take another one and we begin to hit it and continue to hit it until it cracks and breaks and we eventually accomplish what we set out to do. He continued "This morning our hearts are as hard as rock. You have come to us today with the message of the gospel. You have hit our hard hearts and they have not cracked, but if you want them break then you will have to come back and hit them again and again until they break." We went on to another preaching point, and at the end the

service, a man got up clothed in his traditional Swazi dress and asked to say something. We agreed and he said something like this. You have told us this morning about the love of God and how He loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son to free us from sin and give us eternal life, and we have not responded very well. In our culture when a young man wants to marry a certain girl there are procedures that he has to observe in order to win her heart. He doesn't simply knock on her door and asked her to marry him. He courts her and tries to woo her. He has certain kind of clothing he wears in his courtship and eventually he might win her heart. You have told us that you love us, and that God loves us, but you have not won us yet, but if you are going to win us you must come back again and again. The message that came through to me on that extra-ordinary day was that there needs to be persistence in our quest for souls. Jesus said that the shepherd goes after the lost sheep until he finds it. The shepherd is persistent in his search for the lost sheep. Notice that he made the "ONE SHEEP"

**a. Priority. Luke 15:4. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep in the open country and goes after one lost sheep.** The one sheep was his priority. It was his passion. Each parable that Jesus told in this passage of scripture emphasized the value of one. One coin! One sheep! One son! It did not seem that the loss was so great. So why bother with them? One sheep! One coin! One son! Why be concerned with them? Jesus impresses upon us the value of one soul. He is showing us the priorities of His loving heart. People are His priority. The word tells us the God "was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He was not willing that any soul be lost. No coin is expendable; No sheep is expendable and no son is expendable in the sight of God. The force of these parables is that He is focused on the one. Jesus never played down the value of one individual. While He ministered to the masses, He always took time to touch the individual. He stopped under a sycamore tree to invite Himself to the home of Zacchaeus. He went out of His way to travel to Samaria in order to satisfy the spiritual thirst of a Samaritan woman. The significance of this act is

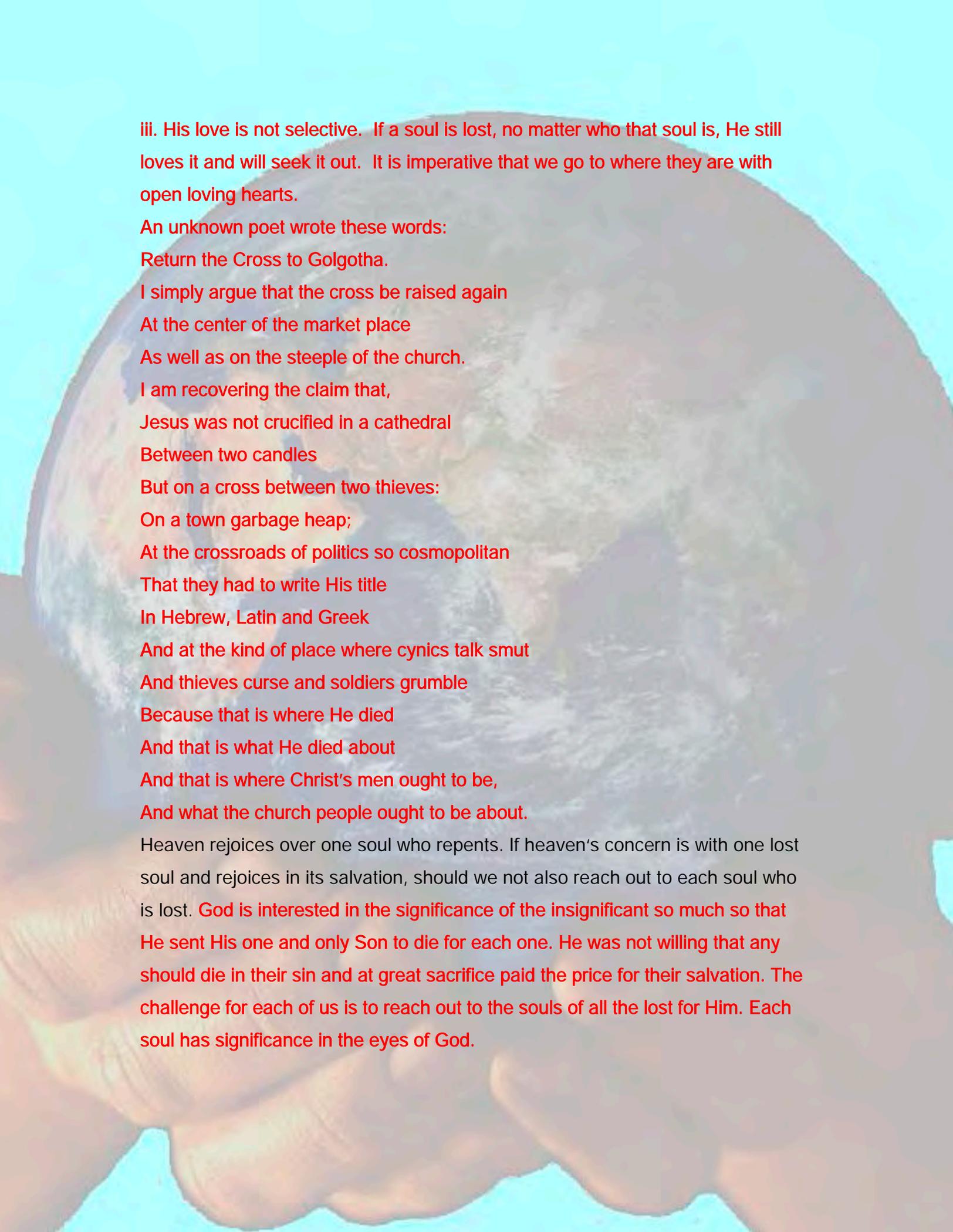
that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans but He went anyway. Her soul was of value to Him. One day He saw Matthew collecting taxes and called him to be his disciple. He heard the desperate cry of blind Bartemaus and gave him his sight. And God the Holy Spirit took Philip away from a dynamic revival in Samaria to minister to a lone Ethiopian in the desert. While Jesus was dying for the world in terrible agony and shame on a cross, He heard the cry of a crucified thief, "Lord remember me when you come into your Kingdom, He took a moment to reassure that criminal that he would be with Him in Paradise on that very day. While He was dying for the world he took time to minister to one lonely soul. If Jesus sought us and bought us with His Blood, should we not take the message to the lost? Freely we have received and freely we must give. This should be a priority of each born again child of God, It also must be his,

**b. Passion. Luke 15: 4-5. He searches until he finds the sheep. "When the shepherd found the sheep, he put it on his shoulders."** Passion drove him to find and rescue his one sheep. He makes the "significance of the insignificant," His singular passion. Mother Teresa wrote that "There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread, but there are many more dying for a little love. Love took Jesus to a cross and it is a love for souls that will reach the lost of our community. There is incalculable worth in one soul. Surely it is our responsibility in our communities to reach out to souls with passion.

### **Conclusion**

The thrust of the message of these parables is that if Jesus is deeply concerned about reaching souls – the one's and the two's, should we not also be concerned to do the same. Note what comes through these lessons.

- i. These things that were lost would not be found unless someone would make an effort to find them.** God knows that men and women are lost and they will never find their way by themselves.
- ii. Each of us are of value to God and because of who we are. He tells us that He even sacrificed His life for us.**



iii. His love is not selective. If a soul is lost, no matter who that soul is, He still loves it and will seek it out. It is imperative that we go to where they are with open loving hearts.

An unknown poet wrote these words:

Return the Cross to Golgotha.

I simply argue that the cross be raised again

At the center of the market place

As well as on the steeple of the church.

I am recovering the claim that,

Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral

Between two candles

But on a cross between two thieves:

On a town garbage heap;

At the crossroads of politics so cosmopolitan

That they had to write His title

In Hebrew, Latin and Greek

And at the kind of place where cynics talk smut

And thieves curse and soldiers grumble

Because that is where He died

And that is what He died about

And that is where Christ's men ought to be,

And what the church people ought to be about.

Heaven rejoices over one soul who repents. If heaven's concern is with one lost soul and rejoices in its salvation, should we not also reach out to each soul who is lost. God is interested in the significance of the insignificant so much so that He sent His one and only Son to die for each one. He was not willing that any should die in their sin and at great sacrifice paid the price for their salvation. The challenge for each of us is to reach out to the souls of all the lost for Him. Each soul has significance in the eyes of God.

