

Lord Jesus, as You have had compassion on us by Your Word, instill in us compassion for the lost and those in the peril of unbelief. Amen. (The Lutheran Study Bible, p. 2157)

I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

In Christ Jesus, through whom you are the children of God, children of the promise, dear fellow redeemed:

On Paul's missionary journeys, upon entering a new city he would usually start out at the local Jewish synagogue to preach the Law and the Gospel. More often than not he would be rejected, even persecuted by his fellow descendants of Abraham. Whether they directly applied the abuse, like the stoning which left him in what was thought to be the condition of death in Lystra, or indirectly by stirring up the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium.

However, despite this mistreatment Paul continued going to the Jews first before turning to the Gentiles in the next location on his missionary journeys. Then towards the end of his work, Paul expressed this sentiment in this letter to the Roman Christians: "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites". You may not have such deep love for your neighbors who were once called your brothers and sisters in Christ to be able to make a similar assertion, but on this day as we consider the love of our Lord for the lost sheep of His flock, we do well to be urged to **Love the Lost in the Hope of Reuniting Them with Christ.**

# I

The 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Luke records the complaint of the Pharisees and Scribes against Jesus that He was spending time with tax collectors and "sinners". Then Jesus follows with three parables of

the lost sheep, coin and son. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, to rescue the unrighteous, not to commend those who thought themselves to be righteous enough without a need for salvation.

The lost sinner is found when the Spirit works in his or her heart repentance over sin and faith in the one and only Savior of sinners. Our Lord's joy over one sinner found is like that of the shepherd who found that one of hundred sheep which was lost and like the woman who found that one of ten silver coins which was lost. But in truth, those comparisons are not as pointed, since the lost sheep and coin were only temporary possessions unlike the lost son. The market would soon consume the sheep from the shepherd's flock and the coin from the woman's purse, not so with sons.

While Paul's love for his fellow Israelites is truly commendable willing to sacrifice himself eternally for their eternal salvation, yet it was a sacrifice, which could never have been made. Such a sacrifice of one sinner for another is impossible. Yet, Christ who expressed His love for sinners, all sinners, like you and me, did entail an acceptable sacrifice for all. It was acceptable because He was eternally righteous. Also He was able to take into Himself the eternal punishment for all sin of all sinners.

Paul's gracious sentiments were an acceptable sacrifice of love in the sight of God however. They were based upon that one acceptable sacrifice made by Christ Jesus for him and all sinners. Paul lived set free from his eternal *lostness* so that he might lose himself being spent for his fellow sinners.

You are recipients of this great sacrifice made for you by Christ Jesus, my fellow children of God. You have been found in your straying, even if it was for that short time as an infant before being baptized. Or perhaps it was a longtime of straying and you were reclaimed by that powerful living Word of God while your reason put up a fierce struggle. But your gracious reclamation is not only for you. It is also for others that you have been found, so that others might be reclaimed for the flock by our Lord through your efforts.

## II

You may be working diligently upon those you know who have gone astray. You fervently pray for them. You speak to them expressing your concern even in the face of rejection or even ridicule. Be encouraged by Paul's perseverance in the face of all the rejection he endured. After all he was able to say with bold confidence: "it is not as though the word of God has failed."

How could he say this? Although being rejected by his fellow Jews in many places, he could still observe his work resulted in

finding children of God among the Gentiles. He observed: “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.”

Children of God’s promise of salvation in Christ were not necessarily physical descendants of Abraham, but they were spiritual descendants. All of us here this morning, whether of Jewish ancestry or not, are called “Israel” by Paul and even more significantly by God Himself. Paul’s work of declaring the Gospel did not remain fruitless, but bore abundant fruit among many ethnic groups in Asia and Europe.

Now perhaps you have lost that intense love for the lost and are just concerned for yourself and perhaps also those closest to you, so that your acts of love are stingily spent. To reach out to the “sinners” in your life is unthinkable: to the vulgar co-worker, the cruel mean distant relative, the person who is holding a grudge against you,. Your response to them and others like them is with expressions of disgust and disregard. This, of course, is not the love Jesus had for His enemies, nor Paul had for his. You are called as adopted children of God to love all, even the “sinners” in your life.

The Pharisees and Scribes in our Gospel lesson whose objection with Jesus working among the “sinners” should have identified themselves in that third parable of the lost son, with the eldest son who did not rejoice when his younger brother was found. Perhaps they did, but not approvingly so. Thinking that the eldest son was right, after all he was the one who sacrificed his life for his father working away while his younger brother was out carousing. I pray none us now nor ever finds him or herself looking upon that older brother with admiration and approval.

Rather love the lost in the hope of reuniting them with their holy brother, Christ Jesus. Seek forgiveness for all the unloving thoughts, feelings and actions against your fellow sinners. Seek forgiveness for all your stinginess of being unwilling to be spent for those beyond who you hold dear in your life. In Christ Jesus you have found that perfect everlasting sacrifice made for those sins and all your sins. You are now set free to serve all your neighbors, those near and dear, far and wide, strange and even wickedly perverse.

What our Lord was able to work in His great Apostle Paul can certainly be worked in us. Pray that by the gracious working of His Spirit upon your heart and life, you may join Paul saying: “I am

speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers". Your salvation does not depend on reaching that point in your spiritual life, but know your salvation in Christ is able to work this same desire in you, Paul's, yes even Christ's, brother or sister. The lost need Christ's love at work in you and by God's grace in Christ it is to the glory of God and welfare of your neighbors. Amen.