

Four Great Losses

Introduction. Following an exhilarating performance at New York's Carnegie Hall in 1999, cellist Yo-Yo Ma went home, slept, and awoke the next day, still exhausted. He hailed a cab to take him to a hotel on the other side of Manhattan, then placed his cello, which was handcrafted in Vienna in 1733 and valued at \$2.5 million, in the trunk of the taxi. When he reached his destination, Ma paid the driver but forgot the cello.

He realized what he had done after the cab disappeared and began a desperate search for the missing instrument. Fortunately, he had the receipt with the driver's ID number. Before the day ended, the taxi was located in Queens with the priceless cello still in the trunk. His evening performance in Brooklyn went on as planned.

The word "lost" strikes fear in the heart of the bravest men. As tragic as the loss of an irreplaceable instrument would be, it pales in comparison to the sense of loss of a child, or greater still, the kind of losses we will evaluate in this lesson.

I. The Lost Book

- A. Josiah began his reign at a low point in Judah's history. The temple was in disorder, the people were addicted to idolatry, and judgment was headed their way. Josiah faced the difficult task of saving his people from destruction. As his construction crew worked to repair the temple, they found a book that forever changed his life. He owed everything that he accomplished to this book, the law of God. As he listened to Shaphan the scribe reading it, Josiah tore his clothes (2 Kings 22:10-13).
- B. Unfortunately, the book of God is lost to many today (Psalm 119:97). This lack of respect for the book has caused massive shifts in public consciousness within only a few years. The opposition to the posting of the Ten Commandments, the banning of prayer in school, the teaching of the theory of evolution and the rejection of creation.
- C. Sadder still, many churches have lost the book. There was a time when a person could not sit in an assembly for any length of time without hearing book, chapter, and verse resonating throughout the building. For many churches, those days are gone. They have lost the book (Acts 5:20; 10:42; 16:10; 18:9). The beauty, consolation, and hope of the scriptures are replaced by the lesser elements of story telling and popular psychology.

II. The Lost Christ

- A. When Jesus was 12 years old, Joseph and Mary took Him to a feast in Jerusalem. Afterwards, as Joseph and Mary traveled home in different groups, each assumed that Jesus was in the other's group. Three days later they found Him in the temple (Luke 2:41-46).
- B. Joseph and Mary lost Jesus, not because they were wicked or because they did not love Him, but because they supposed He was with them.
 1. Some have lost Christ because they are not looking for Him. They fear He will interrupt their lifestyle (John 12:42-43).

2. Others do not know how to look for Him, and therefore look in the wrong places such as a weeping statue or a miraculous experience (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).
3. Some look for Him in churches that promote social and recreational endeavors (Luke 17:21).
4. Still others look for Him with the wrong motives like the Jews who followed Him to receive a handout (John 6:27).

III. The Lost Soul

- A. About a week before His crucifixion, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Jericho, home to one of three main tax offices. Zacchaeus, a rich tax collector, heard that Jesus was to pass that way and was determined to see Him. This encounter left Zacchaeus heir to a much greater fortune than he could have imagined, and Jesus won another soul (Luke 19:1-10).
- B. Since Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, He was concerned about the soul of this man (Matthew 10:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8; cp. Jeremiah 8:17-20). Many people today are so blinded by the materialistic and naturalistic world that they are blissfully unaware of the eternal jeopardy that threatens them (Luke 9:25; 12:20; 16:25; 21:34).
- C. Joseph M. Stowell, the former president of the Moody Bible Institute, reflecting on the nature of those lost today, recounted a story from several years ago. He wrote, "We were on our annual Christmas trek to Chicago. Each year we brought our family to spend time with Grandpa and Grandma and visit the museums. This year we decided to finish our Christmas shopping at suburban Woodfield Mall. In the midst of all the fun and excitement, one of us noticed that little three-and-a-half year-old Matthew was gone. Terror immediately struck our hearts. We had heard the horror stories: little children kidnapped in malls, rushed to a rest room, donned in different clothes and altered hairstyle, and then swiftly smuggled out, never to be seen again. We split up, each taking an assigned location. Mine was the parking lot. I will never forget that night — kicking through the newly fallen snow, calling out his name at the top of my lungs. I felt like an abject fool, yet my concern for his safety outweighed all other feelings. Unsuccessful, I trudged back to our meeting point. My wife, Martie, had not found him, nor had my mother. And then my dad appeared, holding little Matthew by the hand. Our hearts leapt for joy. Interestingly enough, Matthew was untraumatized. He had not been crying. To him, there had been no problem. I asked my father where he had found him. 'The candy counter,' he replied. 'You should have seen him. His eyes came just about as high as the candy. He held his little hands behind his back and moved his head back and forth, surveying all the luscious options.' Matthew did not look lost. He did not know he was lost. He was oblivious to his phenomenal danger. This is a candy-counter culture, where people who do not look lost and do not know they are lost live for consumption."

IV. The Lost Opportunity

- A. Everyone knows the shortest verse in the Bible (John 11:35). Luke 19:41-42 records another occasion that brought the Lord to tears. The Messiah has

performed signs and preached among them, calling on them to repent. Most ignored Him. Now as their judgment draws near, Jesus weeps over their neglect.

- B. "Opportunity" is a sailing term for a favorable wind. It derives from two Latin words, "toward" and "port", thus, blowing toward port. Ancient sailors had to wait for the right wind to blow them into port. If they missed it, another favorable wind might be long in coming.
- C. The people in Jerusalem, by rejecting Jesus, had missed the greatest opportunity they were ever going to get. They are not alone. Christians now are missing the same opportunity (Galatians 6:7-10). My opportunities to do good include spiritual good (Acts 11:23) and physical good (Matthew 25:34-36).

Conclusion. Ability plus opportunity equals responsibility (Ephesians 5:15-16). Paul certainly knew about evil days. He wrote Ephesians from house arrest in Rome. Did he complain about the food? Did he remind them of his unfair treatment? Did he submit a petition to the emperor asking for his freedom? No. He wrote to rescue sinners from spiritual bondage, and to strengthen Christians in their journey to Heaven. If we lose too many days, we risk losing a soul, making this the greatest loss of all.