



In the WORD

Reach the Lost

Rev. Timothy Sandeno

Picture a man wandering in the desert. Without water, he chooses a direction to walk in hopes that he will endure long enough to reach an unknown something ahead, maybe finding his way out. He is lost, and without a map or a GPS to guide him, he simply guesses at which direction to walk.

During Lent it is a very different scene as we watch Jesus step out of the Jordan and, driven by the Spirit, head into the wilderness (Luke 4). His trek is not aimless. It is not directionless. It is purposeful. Jesus is not lost during these 40 days. He is guided by the Word of God that makes clear the path and defeats the devil that seeks to devour Him. A path that would also lead to greater distress and greater joy as He makes His way to cross and resurrection.

Again, it is a very different scene that is portrayed for us in **Ezekiel 34:1–24**, where those appointed to guide and protect God’s people have neglected their duty and have abused their position. How are the people described in **verses 4 and 5**?

The lost (**תָּבֵנִים**), literally “those perishing,” are not being sought after and saved from death. Because the sheep go untended, what does God promise to do in **verse 16**? In **verse 23**, who does He promise to send?

When confronted by the Canaanite woman seeking deliverance for her daughter, Jesus proclaims that He is the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy as the one sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24). And in Zacchaeus’s house in Luke 19:1–10, Jesus declares that He has come to seek and save the lost (ἀπολλύμι), which again should be understood as those perishing. Jesus is the incarnate God and great David’s greater son, come to reach the lost sheep and to shepherd them. He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Way (John 14:6), and salvation for those perishing is in Him alone (Acts 4:12).

The ministry of gathering lost sheep did not stop when Jesus ascended into heaven but rather was expanded as He fills all things (Eph. 4:10–11). **Read John 20:19–23**. Are the disciples being sent to do something different or the same as Jesus? What special gift does Jesus give them for this ministry?

Read Matthew 28:19–20. By what authority were the disciples being sent to baptize and teach? In Acts 1:6–8, where were the disciples to go in this ministry? In Mark 16:15–16 and Luke 24:46–49, with what are they to seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak?

This apostolic ministry of preaching God’s Word of reconciliation in Jesus Christ and administering the Sacraments for the forgiveness of sins is the same holy ministry that continues in the Church today. It is with the same authority that shepherds guard their flocks, evangelists proclaim to all who will listen, missionaries are sent to all nations, and teachers build up in the Spirit-filled Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

It may be the specific calling of our pastors to follow the Apostles in this ministry of Word and Sacrament and their purposeful intention to gather the sheep, but that does not mean that the Word of God is any less powerful in the mouths of any man or woman not ordained. Read **2 Kings 1–14**. In what way does the “girl from the land of Israel” serve as an incidental missionary?

Without special training, she simply offers hope in a hopeless situation by speaking of what she knows. Do you know somebody without hope or in a hopeless situation? How might your interaction with them lead you to offer them hope in the Jesus that you know?

Jesus tells a few parables in **Luke 15:4–32**. What is the result when that which was lost is found?

It is true that we cannot be prepared for every situation, but we can be sure that when we speak of Jesus and His saving work, God’s will is being accomplished. Through preparation at CTSFW, I and my brothers in the ministry have learned how to clearly proclaim God’s Word in both Law and Gospel, that the lost may be found. And as you listen to your pastors and study the Holy Scriptures, you can be sure that the same Spirit that empowered the Apostles prepares you to reach the lost by giving an account, with gentleness and respect, for the hope that is in you. 🏠

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