

Search Party

Ryan Bramlett | Luke 15

Welcome Traders Point. How are we doing? My name is Ryan and I am the campus pastor at our Downtown campus. Today I have the honor of being here with you. I want to tell you right off the bat that it is wild—wild that I am here on this stage and by the end of this night you will see why it is so crazy.

Before we get rolling with what we are going to look at today, we have to stop and look back and celebrate what just happened. A lot of you know last week we had our Christmas services. We had 25 services over four campuses over five days. Guys, we had 18,700 people show up to hear about Jesus. That is unreal.

I want everyone to hear this, 18,000 over 25 services does not happen without a small army of volunteers, men, women, and children sacrificing and serving like crazy to pull that off. So at every campus can we put our hands together and show some love for all our volunteers who made that happen?

And we're going to keep on celebrating. Our guy, Aaron Brockett, preaching 25 sermons and getting better and better in the finals. Does everyone want to give it up for him? Unreal. I'm telling you he is going to be back next Sunday kicking off a brand new series titled *What is Killing You*. So make sure you get back for that.

What a week and what a year. Here we are. It is New Year's Eve, eve and we're about to turn the page on this thing and go into 2019. We are going to celebrate. That's what New Years is all about, us getting together and celebrating our making it. Whether you are going to be in a room with people you love or with people you don't really like or on the couch with your dog just watching the ball drop, we're all going to get together and shout, "Three, two, one, Happy New Year," because we love celebrating.

We will take any chance we get to celebrate. We'll celebrate calendars changing. And I will tell you, the stretch of the century, half-birthdays. I'm cool with birthdays but I will throw a cat a pajama party before I celebrate and recognize your half-birthday.

But we love parties. Sometimes we throw a celebration for a big event like a wedding or graduation, or maybe some of us celebrated when our parents left for a weekend by throwing a party in their house. Did anybody do that? You can't lie in church, get those hands up. I didn't. I didn't, not because I didn't want to but when my parents left, I left as well. They were not leaving me there to figure things out.

But what I want to look at today is what does God celebrate? Have you ever thought about that? What brings God to the point of wanting to throw a party in the first place? What gets his heart beating? That's what we're going to be looking at today. We are going to be jumping into a story that Jesus told about the heart of God, and I'm telling you it is big enough to change everything.

If you are here and you don't know the heart of God maybe you are thinking, "I don't think God celebrates anything, from the God I know," I'm so thankful you are here. Over our time together that is what we are going to do. My hope is that we can take a stethoscope and attach it to God to hear his heart beat, see what he celebrates, see what parties he is throwing and who is on the guest list. I'm telling you, it could change everything.

To look at this, to see the kind of party God wants to throw, we are going to be in Luke 15. We're going to kick things off in verse 1. Before we get there, I want to set the scene for us of what we are going to be walking into.

You see, in Luke 15 Jesus has already begun his ministry. He is going from town to town telling everyone what God is like. He is healing people. He's doing miracles—all of this.

But because of the way he is operating a lot of friction is starting. It's starting because of his teaching and the things he is doing. But the big one we're going to see is there is a lot of problems with who he is associating with. There are some people who think Jesus is attending the wrong parties. They are trying to shut fun down before it ever gets started.

Jesus is going to step on the scene and everything changes. Look at this in Luke 15 starting in verse 1: "Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!"

I laugh every time I read that. You can just see these guys getting so worked up. They are so angry. They are sitting in the back of the room like: Man, do you believe this? Did you see Jesus last week?

What was he doing?

He was associating. He was associating with sinful people. And that's not all of it. The next week he was eating with them, even eating with them.

It's like when my kids get all worked up and they are fighting. They get so upset and are like, "He is bothering me."

"What is he doing?"

"He is looking at me."

I downplayed what we just read about them getting up in arms about Jesus eating with these notorious sinners and tax collectors, but the truth of it is this is a really big deal. In the ancient Near East to sit down and to share a meal with someone was a token of acceptance. What Jesus is doing here, in the name of God, he is sitting down with these notorious sinners and tax collectors and saying this.

I accept you.

I accept you. Notorious sinners, tax collectors, and everyone in between. In the name of God I accept you.

This is not going over very well. To understand who he is extending this acceptance to, you've got to understand who these tax collectors and notorious sinners are.

You see, the tax collectors here are not your regular, run-of-the-mill H&R Block associates. These aren't the guys helping you get your taxes done at the end of the year. They were the most hated and despised people of the time.

They worked for the Roman government, a regime that was brutally killing everyone who got in the way. They would send these tax collectors to get money to grow the empire to get even bigger. A lot of times these guys were crooked. They would inflate the taxes and take an extra cut off the top before they returned it to the government. They were hated and they were the lowest of the low.

Notorious sinners, this is not just for people who didn't go to church, who weren't that religious. Notorious sinners would have been the people who almost had physical markers. These were the people with disabilities who couldn't work. These were the people with diseases, the prostitutes, the marginalized people of society and Jesus is associating with them. More than that he is saying: I accept you.

In the background the religious leaders, the Pharisees, are hurt. They can't process it in their mind. They think because of what they have done, the titles they hold, who they are, that they should be more valuable, treated better. They are worth more than these notorious sinners and tax collectors.

And Jesus hears all of this and it prompts him to tell the story we are going to read. I'm telling you it is crazy. The story we are going to read shows us acceptance is just the beginning, but there is so much more for all of us in the room today.

Take a look at this starting in verse 8. This is Jesus talking: "Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say,

‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

Some of you are like, “What?” We are going to talk about celebrating and what kind of party God would throw and we are talking about some coins? This is why we don’t let Christians throw the parties. You’re doing it all wrong. You shouldn’t have coins there. You probably want to show me some stamps later.

The important thing to see here, the big thing we have to note, is that this is God sharing the heart of God. What he is saying is the lost coin is representative of lost people. That’s the translation. This is about the lost people, the ones the religious people, the Pharisees, are upset Jesus is talking to and talking about.

He says if a woman has ten coins and loses one of these coins (one person is lost) won’t she drop everything and start searching after it? That gives us the first thing we need to see from this story. We notice the coin was lost but it wasn’t forgotten.

We’ve got to pay close attention to this because we’ve got things in our life we’ve lost, but it’s because we’ve forgotten about them. We don’t think about them and then they become lost.

For example, if you came up to me after service today and you said, “Hey Ryan, can I borrow some of your workout equipment? Can I get your chin up bar and some dumbbells and borrow them?” I couldn’t let you do that because I have no idea where they are. They have been lost. They are forgotten about. I haven’t used them.

Do you know how far I’ve fallen off the workout train? When I was writing this sermon it really hit me. I yelled down to my wife, “Have you seen my comfy pants?” By comfy pants I meant my workout pants. I meant the pants Nike spent months in a lab engineering for working out. I’ve reduced them to my comfy pants that I was going to write in. We all have things like that, things we’ve forgotten about. They are lost but we’re not thinking about them.

The important thing we see here is that this is not the way God views you. Whether you are here and you believe or don’t believe or you are unsure I want you to see that. I want you to see that to God you are worth dropping everything for and searching after, right here in the moment. It says she had ten, but the moment she realized that one coin was gone it was worth so much that she dropped everything. To God you are worth it.

Turn to the person next to you and say, “You are worth it.” Now turn to the other person, the one who for whatever reason you decided wasn’t worth it in that moment, and you let him know, “You’re worth it too.”

You are worth it. That’s what this story Jesus tells shows us.

You aren’t forgotten—you’re searched after.

You know the word that is used here when it is talking about everyone being up in arms that Jesus is associating with these people is not associating. That's not a strong enough translation. The picture we really get for associating is we get this picture of Jesus anxiously and eagerly waiting like on the balls of his feet looking for and waiting for people who are lost. He is scouting them out, searching them out, looking left and right trying to find them simply because he has decided they are worth that much to God.

We aren't forgotten, we are searched after because God believes we are worth so much. He has placed that value on each and every one of us. I know as we go through life that truth is hard to hold on to. And it feels like our value is kind of like the stock market going up some days and down others. When we have good days, we feel great and on bad days we don't.

We could have a stretch there. Or maybe you have a string of bad days and you fall back into that addiction or your anxiety ramps up. You begin to think, "I am messed up. I am broken." And the thought that sometimes follows is, "If there is a God there is no way he hasn't walked away from me. For sure he has walked away."

But guys, the beauty in this story is that God is not walking away from you, he is walking toward you. God doesn't see the same way we do. God has already said your value is set. Jesus determined our value when he went to the cross. When God decided we were worth dying for, when he sent his own Son to die for me and you our worth was set. And nothing in this world can steal that.

No amount of bad days and no amount of darkness—no matter how lost you feel God is with you. You have not been forgotten. You are being searched after.

I just want us to live in that for a little bit. This is what it says about God when it comes to me and you. He was willing to search for us and we haven't been forgotten.

That's exactly what we see in the story. The moment the coin was recognized as being lost a search starts. And it is an all-out effort to find this thing. If the coin would have fallen, it wouldn't have fallen onto your engineered hardwood floors. It wouldn't have fallen on a memory foam carpet. It would have fallen in dirt. It would have fallen in dust. It would have been hard work to find it.

She had to sweep the floors, light a lamp, and search every nook and cranny to find this thing because the coin was worth so much to her. The coin hadn't been forgotten, it was worth the search and she would do everything she could to find it.

The parallel in this story, the parallel of this woman searching for the coin in the darkness, in the dirt, the same thing is true for God when it comes to me and you. That's what Jesus did when he came. If you are unsure about what Jesus' ministry looked like when he came to earth,

that's exactly what he did. Just like this woman swept the floors and lit a lamp looking for this lost coin, Jesus did the same thing.

Jesus went from town to town sweeping the streets, going from house to house, city to city, letting everyone know there was a truth that they hadn't been forgotten. They were actually being searched after and they were accepted.

That was just the beginning. When God was going into the darkness God was looking for the people who said they had no value, who felt like they were at the bottom of society, the marginalized people. God said: I'm going to come to live in the margins. I'm going to come to erase the margins altogether. I'm going to erase them because with Jesus there are no longer these titles, there is no longer good and bad, there is simply lost and found, there is dead, and alive.

And thank Jesus that the search party was sent for me and you to find us. That God was willing to go into all of that for me and you. We haven't been forgotten, hear that church. We have not been forgotten.

And I want to go there for a second with this picture of a search party. That's what this shows us, this image of searching, God going from house to house, city to city, looking for those who were lost. That is a search party.

A lot of you, you know what that picture represents. Maybe you've been a part of one, seen one on the news or in a movie. What you see in a search party is that something has gone horribly wrong. Someone is lost. And you send a search party. You see people going through the city streets sweeping every piece of ground, lighting lamps, holding lights in their hands.

They don't stop when the sun drops because what is missing is far too valuable to be forgotten. They sweep the street and they go and look over and over again. It's a search party. Everyone is holding their breath until they find the person who is missing.

When we get to what this story represents—when it's not just a woman looking for a lost coin it is people and it's not just those people, it's us—it's God. We see God as the one leading the search party. He would be the light, he would go into the darkness, he would go into the brokenness. God would wrap himself in the flesh and bone that he spoke into existence in the first place and he would go and sweep the streets from town to town letting everyone know who they were and how valuable they were.

He wouldn't stop there. Jesus would go into the darkest place we had ever created for ourselves, death. Jesus would take on death and defeat death. Light would shine even in darkness and he would bring us hope. Because of Jesus the lost would be found. Because of Jesus the dead would come alive. Thank Jesus that a search party was sent for me and you.

And now that we're there, if you can picture that search party, the urgency, how crazy it was with people scouring the lands trying to find the person who was lost, imagine the party that would ensue when that search party returned. Imagine that search party coming back, lights in one hand holding him (or her) on their shoulders and walking him back to his home. Think of how everyone would go crazy.

The Scripture here tells us that's exactly what the response is for God: "And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."

And we see this story change really quick from this image of a search party with everyone doing everything they can to find this person who is lost to them returning and it immediately turns into a block party. This lady calls out to her friends and family and everyone comes out to celebrate like crazy.

What's even wilder is this tells us that, in the same way, this is what happens in heaven when one person is found. When you are found, when you come to know Jesus and start following him that is such a big deal because you are worth so much that all of heaven throws a party.

What does God celebrate? What brings God to the point of throwing a party?

God celebrates you.

God celebrates you. Come on. This is what he left heaven for. This is what his work was, what he came to do. He celebrates us when we become found.

Guys, the parties aren't done. The block parties, the search parties, they are still going. Because when Jesus defeated death, when he gave us hope and when he left he looked at his followers, he looked at the ones who were found, the ones who still had the dirt on them from when he picked them up, and he said: You go. You are going to be the search party.

This is how the church started, a search party going from town to town telling everyone there that no matter what they felt was their value, whether they felt overlooked or overshadowed, there is a God who loves them enough to die for them. They went from town to town finding these people. They went from being lost to being found.

For 2,000 years search parties have been sent and the search party is still going. I'm here because I was found. I didn't grow up in the church. I was found by a search party this church sent out nine years ago.

Do you want to know why it is so wild I am up here preaching today? Because it feels like just yesterday I was sitting on the other side of this. When I was 20 years old I got setup on a blind

date with a woman. I didn't know anything about her, she didn't know anything about me and we went out for the night.

There was a group of us, it was great and we were hanging out but I quickly noticed there was something different about her. I'd never met anyone like her. And it was more than this, but it wasn't less, she didn't even cuss. We were together the whole night and not one little tiny nothing. Nothing slipped out. It was like she wasn't moved by what was going on around her. It was like she had been given a different script to live by than I had.

I was curious, but didn't know why. Have you ever been there? And at the end of the night I said, "Hey, I would love to go out on a date with you," and she said, "Yes." We went out that Friday and it was a great night. I'm telling you. We went to Max and Erma's, one of the fanciest restaurants Indy has to offer. We went to the movies and saw the latest and greatest Nicholas Sparks, Channing Tatum film *Dear John*. It was a great night.

And I'm dropping her off at her house and I said, "I had a great time." She said, "Me too," and then, "Would you want to go to church with me on Sunday?"

I said, "No, I don't want to go to church with you on Sunday. I'm a good person, but church just really isn't my thing. Thanks but no thanks." She was pretty confused. She looked at me and said, "I don't go to church because I'm a good person. I go to church because of Jesus."

Then she told me that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus was sent here, lived this life, and then he died for me. In that moment I was trying to picture it. I was trying to picture if there could be a God like that. I never thought much of God before that night, but if I did it was a God of morality, of good people. And from my experience, just being honest, it was a God of arrogant people.

It wasn't of a God who would send his only Son. It wasn't of a God like we are talking about today, the one who says we are accepted, the one who says we are searched after. It wasn't that God.

But as I was sitting there trying to connect all the dots I was like, "Is this real? Is God really like this?" I couldn't shake it. So by the time she got out of the car I changed my answer and said, "Yes, I do want to go to church with you on Sunday."

When I came to church I came here. I came to this building, this room right here, and I sat over there. Brockett was standing here. He didn't mess it up too bad and I got to hear again who Jesus is and what he is about.

I'm telling you, my life changed. I saw myself not as someone who was pretty put together but as someone who was lost, in need of being found. I was more messed up than I thought possible but at the same time I was more loved than I ever knew. I was worth dying for. I came back and back again. I learned more and saw more of who Jesus was.

I got to this point where I said, “I believe this. This is real and I’m giving my life to it. I’m going to be baptized.” I was baptized right over there in that baptistery. Wild. I came out and I said, “I’m telling everyone everywhere who Jesus is and what he has done,” and did a horrible job along the way. But God still used me.

Two years after I got baptized, I got to baptize my own mother. Once again in that baptistery over here. We’re talking about generations changing. We’re talking about eternity changing because God sent a search party for me and it was led by a woman named Stephanie. Today Stephanie is my wife. She is the mother of my three children. Look at that.

And with a conversation on a Friday night about who Jesus is, everything changed. Now heaven will be a little more crowded and hell a little more empty because of that search party.

God is not done. God is not done sending search parties. He is still going. We just had that beautiful picture of what that looks like. And you see the church picking up the role of Jesus. As Jesus went from town to town sweeping the streets, looking for those who were lost, now the church is the woman in that story. The church is the one being sent out and that’s where you see the search party.

Look at this picture. This was at one of our Christmas services last week. We do this every year. It’s a beautiful picture and what it’s representative of is the light of the world coming here—Jesus coming here. What you see are thousands of people standing here holding a light. When you see that picture inside this building, it is beautiful. But imagine if you saw this in our city. Imagine if you saw that coming down the road, in Carmel, Avon, Downtown, here on the Northwest side.

Imagine if you saw that. That would be serious. That would be a search party. And guys, that is what Jesus has called us to do every single week we would leave here and be the search party God is sending because there are 1.7 million people here who are lost, 1.7 million people here who need to know about the love of God, that they haven’t been forgotten, they are being searched after that very day and we would be the ones to go to them.

We would be the ones who get to help find them and we would treat them just like God would treat them. That means we would love them. That means we associate with them, and even eat with them. And we love them right where they are, not faking anything. But we love them and they come to know Jesus.

This love God has given us, this search party he sent us for is also for the 15,000 kids right now who are in the foster care system. There are 15,000 kids who are motherless and fatherless. They need to know more than anything that there is a God who loves them, that there is a God who is searching after them, that they are valued, that they are loved and nothing is going to stop us from getting to them because God sent a search party.

Guys, this year... I've done this before—we get into a spot where we begin to just kind of put people in categories, people who we live with, people we see all the time. “They are just too far gone. They wouldn't accept this. They wouldn't be interested in this. They're too crazy.” Maybe your family is a little crazy, not mine.

But whatever it is, I want to stop right now and say don't let that lie creep in. Don't put anyone into a box, don't put anyone in a place where they are too far gone because God will go to lengths we can't imagine to reach his lost sons and daughters.

And the beautiful thing about this story of Jesus making a switch here and referring to people who don't know him as lost it completely changes the way you view something as lost. When something is lost, you don't get mad at it for being lost. When the woman lost the coin she didn't begin yelling at the coin and getting frustrated at the coin, she just got to work to find it. When Jesus saw us from heaven and we were broken and messed up, his enemy, he didn't yell at us. He got to work finding us.

When you and I get to work finding those who are lost, that's when everything begins to change. Imagine if we would leave here and go through this year seeing people the way God sees them, seeing them as lost, seeing them as in need of a search party and we are the only ones who were sent.

Think about how gentle we would be. Think about how loving we would be. Think about how caring we would be. Guys I think if we can do that everything can change. Let's make 2019 the year we do whatever it takes to get the person on our heart into a relationship with Jesus, that he or she would come to know the love of God.

That's our prayer as a church, that no one would be safe from the love of God. We are all a part of the search party. No one is excluded. If you believe in Jesus grab a light and get to work. We are going to go find some people. This isn't for the perfect Christians. This isn't for the Christians who have been Christians for years. This isn't for you when you graduate. This is us right now. We are the search party.

Let's go, because I am telling you God is already ten steps ahead of us. He has already laid his cards on the table. He has shown us what he is going to do in 2019. We just have to be willing to go with him.

Like in the beginning of the story it tells us the definite response of God. It says this: “If a woman loses a coin... **Won't she** light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it?” This is God's response to lost sons and daughters. His response is: I'm going to do whatever it takes to find them. Are we going to go with him?

I hope wherever you are today, wherever you are and whatever you believe, if you believe in God or you are unsure and don't know, I just pray that you could hear these words this year.

That they would echo in your mind no matter what situation you find yourself in this year. Won't he do it?

No matter where you are, what situation you find yourself in for 2019, whether you're on the side of, "I just don't even think God accepts me. I think he walked away from me." You can say, "Won't he? Won't he walk toward me? Won't he search after me?"

If you are here and you feel like everything has been taken from you and you don't have anything then you can say, "Won't he? Won't he answer my prayers?"

If you are having trouble going through any kind of relationship struggles then you can say, "Won't he? Won't he restore that relationship with my father? Won't he?"

There is hope. Won't he send his only Son to die for me? Won't he? Won't he meet me right here in my mess, even when I mess up again? Won't he? Won't he forgive me? Won't he forgive me again?

Won't he be with my kids who have walked away from the faith? Won't he? Isn't he standing right there waiting for them to turn back around? Won't he be there to catch them? Won't he?

God is all in. Look at this in Romans 8:32: "Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, **won't he** also give us everything else?"

Won't he? Won't he leave heaven to start a search party for you? Won't he search and sweep the streets until he finds you? Won't he show up time in and time out? God moved heaven and earth for this and he's not stopping now. He didn't stop even when it meant sending his only Son to die for me and you. And now church we are the search party.

And if you're here today, if you're here today and maybe you're hiding in plain sight, you are in the shadows wondering if God can be this good. Is God really like this? I just want to say that we would be honored to throw a party in your name. We would be honored to celebrate with you. So please come up and talk to someone before you leave today.

And guys, our hope—our hope for this year is that we would leave every single Sunday and a search party would be sent. Sent from here and at North, Downtown, West, and we would take more and more ground.

And every single week people would return, going from lost to found and we would celebrate. We would throw the biggest party you've ever seen. We would see life change, baptisms, and we would party our faces off knowing that the party that is happening here has nothing on the one that is going on in heaven.

What I want us to do right now is go into a moment of reflection, a moment where we can sit here and focus on God really being this good. He has already laid his cards on the table, and you

and I get to respond. We get to join the search party. We get to pick up a light and a broom and start working on that person God has laid on our heart.

I'm going to pray for us. Then take the next few minutes and just sit on that and think about this kind of God. Let's pray.

God, we love you. God, you are wild. Wild enough to send a search party because you love us that much. Wild that because of you we could go from lost to found, we could go from dead to alive. Because of you we have hope that nothing can steal. Our value is set in you.

God, thank you for this opportunity to join you in the search party. Allow us to see the world as you see it. Allow our hearts to break for what yours breaks for.

God, allow us to join in the celebration this year. Let us be reminded that what we do here and as crazy as we go, as hard as we go, and the parties we have and the celebrations that happen here are nothing compared to what is going on up there.

Jesus, we love you and it's in your perfect name we pray. Amen.