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What Does it Mean to Be Lost?

By Tal Davis

Legend has it that Daniel Boone was once asked: "Have you ever been lost?"

He thought a moment and answered, "No, but I have been bewildered all day."

Most of us know the panicky feeling of being lost in a crowd or on a journey. When I was just a small boy I got lost at the circus. I got engrossed feeding peanuts to the elephants and when I turned around the family I went with was gone.

I also recall, as an adult, a time I was trying to drive out of Boston's Logan Airport and found myself going around circles. Somehow I went through the Ted Williams Tunnel twice!

In my last article I described how various fields of endeavor have their own unique jargon that other people may not understand. We evangelicals also have our own jargon. One such word we use often is the term "lost." We talk about "lost souls." We say people are "lost in sins" or "lost without Christ," etc.

We say it is biblical because Jesus said he came "to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11). He also told the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, etc. (see below). But if we really want to reach the "lost," we need to define what we mean by that term.

As we did with the word "saved," let's begin with a basic definition. Webster's dictionary gives us several possibilities:

1. Not to win at a competition - as in baseball, football, etc. Vince Lombardi was supposed to

have said, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing!" The late great race car driver Dale Earnhardt reportedly said, "Second place is just being the first loser."

2. Unable to find the way - The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years (until Mrs. Moses finally asked for directions).

3. No longer visible - "Captain Kirk, we have lost the Klingons. They are using their cloaking device!" exclaimed Mr. Scott.

4. Lacking assurance or self-confidence - Daniel Boone on one occasion.

5. Ruined or destroyed - "If not for the courage of the fearless crew, the Minnow would be lost!"

6. No longer possessed or known - "Please Lord, help me find my lost ring. Oh, never mind, here it is."

In the Christian context, we say those who do not have Christ as Savior are "lost." This makes sense in light of the above definitions. They are all relevant to the unsaved person's life condition.

As we mentioned, Jesus spoke in several places about finding something or someone who was "lost" to illustrate His reason for coming.

"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost." (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10 NASB)

Luke, in chapter fifteen of his Gospel, records Jesus' response to criticism of Him eating with "sinners."

1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

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The Lost Sheep

3 So He told them this parable, saying, 4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The Lost Coin

8 "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The Lost Son

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living... 17 But when he came to his senses... 21 the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23

and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate... 32 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'" (NASB)

In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (KJV) the Apostle Paul says this:

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Verse three of this passage in the King James Version is the only place in Scripture where unsaved people are specifically called "lost" (*apollumenois*). The NASB, NIV, & HCSB versions translate "them that are lost" as "those who are perishing." Whatever, clearly the term "lost" is an accurate biblical description of those without Christ.

In our Christian usage it actually has meaning in the three dimensions of time in a person's life.

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Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

info@marketfaith.org

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

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The Past - Being "lost" means being burdened by the failures and sins of a person's past life.

Suppose you took road trip from Florida to California. What if, as you drove, you did not use a road map, have GPS, or printed out Map-quest? What if you also had no compass and never followed the signs? Eventually you would almost certainly get very lost. It would be the inevitable result of relying on your own wits, going your own way, and not following directions.

The Bible teaches we have all done that in our lives. In our past we all have attempted to live without the guidance of God. That is the essence of what the Bible calls SIN. Thus we are burdened by our past failures. That is the essence of genuine GUILT.

Psychologists tell us that the mind records everything we experience and do – good and bad. Our subconscious stores it so we cannot avoid guilt. If we try to repress guilt, it will express itself in other ways such as depression, stress, anger, or even violence.

As Paul says in Romans 2:14, 15
14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them. (NASB)

Our conscience bears witness to what is right and wrong. Even those who are lost have some kind of conscience, though repeated wrongdoing tends to deaden it. Being lost is bearing the guilt of past sins. Guilt is real and accumulates unless it is dealt with appropriately.

The Present - Being "lost" means being in bondage to the confusion, emptiness, and despair of the present.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:3, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: (perishing)." It is a present reality. But how so? It means being trapped in a state of "lostness." It is the sense of emptiness and despair that characterizes so many people today. Paul says in verse 4 that the "god of this world" (Satan) has blinded their minds.

One of the most influential thinkers of the 20th Century was the French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. His basic theme was the intrinsic meaninglessness of life. As one commentator put it, "Sartre's fundamental experience is that which he called nausea, disgust, or revulsion against being." That's so uplifting, wouldn't you agree?

Sartre's philosophy exemplifies what present lostness, in the biblical sense, is all about. People today try to fill the emptiness they feel with drugs, alcohol, sex, or even good things like sports, music, education, and money. Those things do not really satisfy, so they often become obsessions and addictions (consider Hollywood). So being lost is to be cut off from the only real source of life: a personal relationship with God.

The Future - Being "lost" means ultimately having no real confidence, peace, or hope for the future.

One of my favorite movie series from the 1980s and 90s was the Back to the Future trilogy. I still enjoy watching the adventures of Marty McFly and Doc Brown as they travel back and forth through time in their DeLorean Time Machine. The second episode of the trilogy has Marty and Doc transporting ahead 30 years from 1985 to the year 2015. Wait a minute...that's next year! Wow! I

can't wait to get one of those flying cars and a hover board. (But, apparently, fax machines are going to make a big comeback next year and everyone will have to turn in their PCs, cell phones, and i-pads.)

We still speculate a lot about the future. It is usually not as optimistic as was Back to the Future. Predictions are often bleak with growing fear of terrorism, climate change, nuclear war, etc. For most people, however, their biggest fear is the inevitability of their own death. Part of human lostness is the lack of hope for the future. In fact, the Bible says the "lost" have no hope for the future in this life or the next.

Jesus warned, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3) Literally it reads, "...no conceivable way, not possible" or simply "No Way!" Jesus warned of eternal judgment. Hell is more than a swear word. It is where our desires are never fulfilled and a place of never ending "lostness."

The world, too, remains lost and has no ultimate hope without the assurance of Jesus that He will come again.

So, what does all this mean? It means that mankind, and each person, is "lost" in sin and hopelessness - past, present, and future. By this definition, are you lost? If so, you can be found through Jesus Christ. In the past - He forgives sins all absolutely if you confess your sins, repent and receive Him as your Lord and Savior. In the present - He gives life real meaning, confidence and value. In the future - He provides for eternal life in heaven for those who trust in Him. Likewise, He promises someday to return and create a new heaven and a new earth. With Christ you will never be lost again.

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