

ONE LOST SHEEP

The parable of the lost sheep is about a shepherd who leaves his flock of ninety-nine to find the one which was lost. It was told by Jesus when the Pharisees and the religious leaders were accusing Him of fraternising with sinners. In Luke's Gospel it is followed by the parables of the lost coin and the prodigal son.

Mt. 18:12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? **13** And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. ... **Lk. 15:1** Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. **2** And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. **3** And he spake this parable unto them, saying, **4** What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? **5** And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. **7** I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Elizabeth Clephane (1830-69), who was a daughter of a Sheriff of Fife, wrote a poem which was taken by Ira D. Sankey and turned into a well-known hymn first sung by Sankey at a mission conducted by D.L. Moody in Edinburgh,

There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away, far off from the gates of gold –
Away on the mountains wild and bare, away from the tender shepherd's
care.

We can imagine the people listening to Jesus as He told this parable, and they were familiar with often seeing the shepherd leading his flock. In fact, it is the oldest occupation for Abel the son of Adam was a shepherd (Gen.

4:4), and many of the Old Testament characters were shepherds ... including Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Amos. The most famous psalm begins ... **Ps. 23:1** The LORD is my shepherd.

It is within this context the Lord Jesus told the parable. In a previous encounter, as He surveyed the multitudes who followed Him, to listen and be healed, **Mt. 9:36** he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Every individual soul is precious to the Saviour. You are not a ‘number’ to Him, or a name He does not recognise. You are not someone at a distance from Him, but you are personally precious. He saw and loved the multitudes, but equally He loved the ones and twos like Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, the rich young man, and the children on the shores of Galilee.

In these days when there is such a spiritual drought in our land, we hear of special methods we should try in presenting the Gospel so hordes of people will be saved. ... But it is not like a ‘production line’ where it is up to us to ‘manufacture’ new Christians ... When a soul comes to Christ for salvation it is a special and an intimate work of God’s grace. One single soul is a prized treasure to Him, as was this solitary lost sheep who had gone astray.

In the previous verse, Jesus made a beautiful declaration, **11** For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. It is a powerful word Matthew used to describe the lost (ἀπόλλυμι) for it means ‘to put out of the way entirely’, ‘to put an end to’ ... It is two Greek words combined with the meaning ‘to destroy forever without hope and beyond hope’! There is nothing a person can do to save themselves, or to find their way back into the fold. They cannot stop themselves from doing that which is contrary to the shepherd. They have a natural inclination to break His Word and to disobey it. The Lord Jesus was referring to our spiritual condition, as described elsewhere, that **Rom. 3:10** There is none righteous, no, not one: **11** ... there is none that seeketh

after God. ... **Is. 64:6** we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. ... Martyn Lloyd-Jones explained, “If a man is saved, it is because God has saved him. But if a man is lost, that is to be attributed to his own rejection of the Gospel and his rebellion against God’s way of salvation”.

I don’t think anyone who truly examines themselves could disagree with that analysis. We are all too-aware of our strong natural bias and impulse to deny God, - it is all around us. What He says about sin is disregarded and opposed ... and the Gospel as the only means of salvation is denied by an unbelieving world ... and apart from God’s grace, no one would ever believe, and no one would be saved! Consequently, acceptance before God and entrance into Heaven would be denied *apart from* God’s grace for He sent His Son Who affirmed, **Jn. 14:6** I am the way, the truth, and the life: *no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*. Believing in Jesus Christ is the only remedy for sin and He is the only access into Heaven, **Jn. 10:9** I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.

Basing our study on Mt. 18:12,13, there are three simple observations, firstly ... **THE SHEPHERD’S CARE**. ... The most prevalent target of the devil is the mind, - it is spiritual warfare at its most treacherous. He infiltrates the mind and attempts to convince you God could not possibly be personally interested in *you*. Why would He want to have anything to do with *you*? Why would God want to be involved with *you*? ... Indeed, he has a point for why *should* God be interested in you and me? What have we ever done that should attract Him to us? ... From a human perspective, we ought not even to be on ‘God’s radar’!

However, do not allow the devil to pervade your mind because here is why God became involved with us, Paul wrote, **Eph. 2:4** But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, **5** Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved). You cannot

explain God's grace towards us for it is beyond our understanding. And yet, His Word explains He loves us more than the deepest love we can comprehend. He loves us when we don't deserve it. He loves us even when we turn our backs towards Him.

God cares for you more than you know ... **Is. 41:10** Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... **13** For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. ... **Is. 43:2** When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. ... **Ps. 40:17** But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer. ... **Ps. 34:17** The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. **18** The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. ... **I Peter 5:6** Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: **7** Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you

From the moment the Lord Jesus entered this world and was laid in a manger He already loved you. On the cross of Calvary where He died, He died because He loved you. He endured the pain of the cross, the scoffing and ridicule of the crowds, and even His own Father forsaking Him because He loved you. He took upon Himself all the pain and shame that ought to have been yours and mine throughout eternity because He loved us.

His was not the type of love that was 'skin-deep', but He loved you in and from eternity. He came to earth for no other reason but to save you ... In fact, that is what His Name means, JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Mt. 1:21).

But how can God be interested in me? Why did He put Himself through such heartache and conflict? ... He did it because He knows what we would

become when we believe in Him to be saved. He saw us as His children, and He came to claim us as His own.

Yes, of course, he had the other ‘ninety-nine’ and He loved and cared for them too. He loved them all the same and without reservation. None went hungry or thirsty, or in danger. He saw to their every need ... but when one was lost, He was constrained to go out and find it.

What would cause a sheep to become lost? ... Simply, it becomes separated from the flock and gets itself into a place from which it does not know the way back to the shepherd. ... Maybe it got lost because it was enjoying the grass too much and its appetite took it away ... Maybe it kept eating and eating, not because it was hungry, but because it had become greedy, and its greed was the reason it had become lost. ... Or maybe it was following another sheep, and they both separated from the flock and went down to the river bank, dangerously close to the edge, or maybe they find themselves on a precipice, perilously overlooking the valley far down below ... and where one goes, the other follows ... and neither of them knows how to return to safety. ... Another reason for a sheep becoming lost might be because it doesn’t keep up with the rest, and it forgets its responsibilities to the flock.

Whatever happened, the Lord Jesus tells the parable about the one sheep who had gone astray in the mountains and the shepherd went out to look for it. ... **The Shepherd’s Care.**

THE SHEPHERD’S COMMITMENTThe shepherd knows the hills. He knows every valley, every cave, and every height. There is no place his sheep can go beyond His reach and His care. The sheep that strays will be found. ... It is amazing how the shepherd goes out looking for those who have strayed and who want to be found, but it is even more gracious of Him to go out searching for those who do *not* want to be found. The Shepherd of the sheep, - the Lord Jesus, - put Himself in the greatest danger when He came into this

world. He ‘climbed over its rocks’, He ‘delved deep into its gullies’, He went out onto the most precarious and perilous promontories ... wherever the sheep had become lost, nothing would hinder Him from finding it.

Consider the love God had for you as He sought you, O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me (Ps. 139:1). ... The dens He visited, the cesspits he trawled through, the exposure to danger He faced to bring you ‘home’ ... When you were outside the fold and had no interest in looking for Him, He kept going until He picked you up and was carrying you in His arms of salvation, He seeketh that which is gone astray (Mt. 18:12). No one told Him He had to, but He *chose* to. All He did to save us was of His own decision and grace to come into this world to find us. ... “Oh, the love that sought me! Oh, the blood that bought me! Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold!”

In the same way He loved us, how we ought to long for others to be saved too! God can save a person no matter how low they sink ... He can save them no matter how far they have wandered. ... The great Shepherd of the sheep finds them torn with thorns ... He finds them tired and weary. Such was our Saviour’s commitment, for He would not cease from His searching until He found the sheep which had gone astray.

Notice the “if” in v. 13, *if so be that he find it*. They have become so hopelessly lost, that only Christ could find them ... no one else but the Lord Jesus, the Shepherd. His salvation alone can save them. ... Many had given up hope of ever being discovered. They had wandered from the fold and become so astray they did not know what way to turn! ... Yet, despite their predicament, the Shepherd would not stop looking until He brought them home to the fold.

You know, ninety-nine is not a hundred ... and as long as there is one missing the Shepherd will keep searching until He finds it. ... He knows He can leave the ninety-nine, even in the wilderness. He has watched over them,

protected them, fed them, cleaned up after them, lived with them ... where they would be, so He would be ... They belonged to Him and He belonged to them. ... *Yet*, He could not rest until *all* His sheep were safely in. He knew every one of their sounds, and He knew all their names ... and they knew His voice. ... **The Shepherd's Care and the Shepherd's Commitment ...**

THE SHEPHERD'S CHEER When the shepherd found the sheep, he did not chastise him for getting lost. Instead, he was glad to receive him, and he knelt down, and the wanderer testified, "He whispered to assure me, I've found thee, thou art Mine". ... *Now*, the shepherd had all one hundred sheep, - every last one of his flock had been gathered in! ... He loved them all the same for each one was equally precious. He would have done the same for *any* of them.

Around the throne of Heaven are gathered a great number of the Redeemed, but there are yet some to be gathered in. He knows who they all are, and He is coming back for every one of them, **Is. 40:11** He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom *In ear to His heart!*

I have a Shepherd, One I love so well;
How He has blessed me tongue can never tell;
On the cross He suffered, shed His blood and died,
That I might ever in His love confide.