

The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

Rev. R. DeRuiter

Psalter 52:1-4

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

Psalter 88: 1-3

Psalter 152:1, 2, 5

Psalter 284:1-3

We often hear stories from families about the time they left a son or daughter at church, and didn't discover it until they were on the way home. Sometimes we can also lose a child at a store, or a shopping mall. When this happens, a parent has a very uneasy feeling. Often the mind thinks the worst in these situations. "What if they were abducted?" Or, "What if we never find them?"

It can be even more unsettling if the child has been lost in a large forest. And there are accounts in history where children really do get abducted and even lose their life, or never get found.

Well, this morning we shall look at a parable that Jesus told about a lost sheep. Our text is Luke 15:3-5.

*And he spake this parable unto them, saying,
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? And when he hath found it,
he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

Our theme is: **The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep**, with these three thoughts:

1. A necessary search: "if he lose one of them, doth

2 The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

he not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost?" (verse 4)

2. A persevering search: "until he find it" (verse 4)

3. A rejoicing rescue: "and when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (verse 5)

I. A necessary search

Congregation, this parable of the seeking Shepherd is the first of three parables given in Luke 15. There is also the parable of the lost coin, and the lost son. All have as their theme the recovery of the lost sinner. All speak of the Lord Himself bringing back the lost sinner to the kingdom of heaven. All address the fact that the Lord brings back the lost sinner by the way of repentance. Also, all tell of the joy of the Lord and of His angels. The shepherd rejoices in finding his sheep, the woman over finding her coin, and the father in the return of the son.

Each parable emphasizes a particular aspect of the repentance of the lost sinner. The parable of the lost sheep emphasizes the truth of the seeking Shepherd. The parable of the lost coin focuses upon the conscious conversion and repentance of the sinner and his return to the kingdom and to the church. The parable of the lost son specifies the willingness of the heavenly Father to receive His wayward children.

The setting for these parables is given in the first two verses of the chapter. Jesus Christ attracted publicans and sinners to Himself. They are especially drawn to Him because of His gospel message, and eagerly wait to hear His words. The scribes and Pharisees were looking for such occasions when these publicans and sinners would draw around Him, that they might accuse Him.

The publicans were tax collectors, under the hire of Rome. These publicans were often greedy people, extortioners, and covetous. The Jews despised these publicans. They considered them traitors to the cause of Israel.

The sinners referred to were the common people of

Luke 15:3-5

3

the land. They did not regard the Mosaic law, and the Pharisees and scribes regarded them as the scum of the earth. To these self-righteous Pharisees, these people had no right to the promises to Abraham.

The Pharisees did not think that Jesus could be the Messiah if He ate with these people for that would pollute Him. Oh no, the kingdom was theirs only, they thought. The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

It was just this murmuring that occasioned the three parables. Jesus opens before these Pharisees and scribes the way things are before God.

The ninety-nine sheep are Israel; they are the ones of which the Pharisees and the scribes are included. He shows to these Pharisees that His eating with publicans and sinners is not discounting but validating that He was the true Messiah.

The Shepherd undertakes a necessary search for a sheep that is lost. It is a sheep that has lost his way. Oh, it is so necessary that we, spiritually, see that we are like this lost sheep due to our lost state, our deep fall, and our most corrupt depravity. It is not that we earn or merit conversion by seeing our lost condition, for that would merit nothing before God. No, it is coming to the awareness of the reality of our lostness, our hopelessness, and our helplessness that is necessary.

This is a necessary search, for there is a real need. Those who are converted in their own eyes apart from Christ, shall forever be lost through their self-deceit and presumption, if they see not their hopeless condition.

Many today quickly assume themselves to be converted to God, yet have nothing more than an imaginary Christ. You shall not save yourself with a delusion of presumption.

Have you ever been truly lost? Then there is a necessary search for you, and not before then. Have your

4 The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

eyes ever been opened to see what you really are before God as a sinner deserving hell?

The ninety-nine sheep did not see this. They were contented into assuming they were God's elect. They had no need of repentance for they were never truly lost. It is the lost one that got the Shepherd's attention. The lost one was the need for the search.

It was a necessary search because it was a search that was decreed from eternity to take place. It was not a search that was necessitated by the goodness or any quality of the sheep. The qualities of the sheep were only depravity and waywardness. That was the corruption that brought him to his lost estate; there is nothing desirable in that. Rather, it was a search that was necessitated from the goodness of the triune God.

It was the Good Shepherd that gave His life for the sheep, not the Shepherd who came for the good sheep. The triune God from eternity, out of His sovereign good pleasure, decreed to seek and to save that lost sheep. The Shepherd leaves the ninety and nine and He goes after the lost one.

Oh, by nature we care not to see our lostness. By nature we think we do God service; we are so beneficial to Him. In our deep fall in Adam we think ourselves to be something, when we are nothing. We are like the hypocrites of Isaiah 65:5, "which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou."

What a great self-deception this is, to think yourself to have something; yes, to think yourself to be something that you are not, nor ever were! True children of God do not only see their lostness one time, but repeatedly.

It is the Pharisee that declares, "We have Abraham to our father" (Matt. 3:9). It is the Pharisee that says, "We be not born of fornication; we have one father, even God" (John 8:41). Yet, if one has God as his Father then he knows Jesus Christ, for He is His Son, who came forth

Luke 15:3-5

5

from God. He knows Him not merely as a fantasy of his mind, but he knows Him personally, really, in truth.

Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you not just know about Him, but do you know Him, personally? If you have never been lost, you have never come to know Him either, for He came not for those who see themselves as imperfect, or with a few minor errors, but He came for the lost sinner.

It is a most necessary search that the Shepherd engages in. God created man originally good, and after His own image, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. There was nothing lacking in that original and first creation of man; but Adam willfully partook of that forbidden fruit. He disobeyed his Creator.

We are exiled from Paradise, estranged from the garden, lost, and condemned, dead in trespasses and sin. By nature, you do not see your sin as you are in your deep fall in Adam. You are blind to your fallen, corrupted, and deadened condition. You care for none of these things. You wish not to see it! You don't wish to admit, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way," as Isaiah 53:6 says. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost, and it was, secondly,

II. A persevering search

Our text tells us that the Shepherd left the ninety-and nine and went after the lost until He found it. He did not stop the search until that sheep was found. The Shepherd seeks the lost sheep amidst all obstacles, in spite of all difficulties and dangers. A sheep that is away from the fold was in a most dangerous predicament. There were many perils that faced a lost sheep. There were wolves and other predators that could destroy them. There was the open exposure to the elements and climate. There was the danger of starvation and disease. There were hazardous terrain, steep cliffs, quicksand, and desert areas.

6 The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

Sheep are very dumb and unaware of their danger. So we, too, are the same way. We see not our dangerous and condemnable condition. We see not that any moment our life may end and we can be sent to an eternal hell. At any moment, like a sheep that stands upon a cliff can turn and fall headlong to its destruction, so can each one of us.

I once read of a man that had gotten lost in a mine. It was all black and dark. He could not see where he was going, so he stopped and cried out. A man passing by heard the cries of this man in the mine, in the dark. When that passerby pointed a light in the direction of the cries, the light displayed that one inch from where that man was standing was a huge drop of several hundred feet. Had that man moved one step, he would have perished.

That's how we are also by nature. We see not our danger. We know not of our predicament in sin and its dark sway. We are blind to our hell-worthy danger. We are hardened to our perilous condition.

The Shepherd also travels these conditions. The Shepherd also meets with dangers along the way in search for the sheep, yet out of His love for the sheep, He does not mind them.

The Shepherd shall send a light to show us what we are by nature: the light of His law and gospel, by the power of His Holy Spirit. His law is given to show us what we are, and how greatly we have wandered and strayed from the fold. His gospel is given to inform that there is a way out, there is a remedy for our sin.

Often a sheep would wander off from the rest of the flock to find some green grass of the mountains to graze upon. Sometimes these wandering sheep would jump down ten or twelve feet in order to have what they wanted. The problem was, they couldn't get back up, so when the shepherd heard the bleating of the lost sheep, bleating in distress, he would go to where the sheep was

Luke 15:3-5

7

located. However, he would not attempt to rescue it. He would leave it there for two or three days. He would leave it there until it had eaten all the grass that was there, and it was so weak that it couldn't stand on its own.

After that the shepherd would manage to get a rope around the sheep and pull it to safety. The reason that the shepherd would wait until the sheep was so weak it couldn't stand up, is because if the shepherd would try to rescue it any sooner, the sheep would have resisted and would have endangered itself even further.

This is also how Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, deals with His sheep. He waits until they learn their desperate need. Often it is that when a sinner has tried everything this world has to offer, he comes to an end of himself and the grazing remedies of this world. He learns that he is weak in himself, that he is undone, and worthy of judgment and just condemnation.

It is at these times that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, reaches down and places His arms around him, and draws him back to Him with cords of everlasting love.

Oh, but the Shepherd persevered, enduring the cross, despising the shame! He left heaven. He condescended to men of low estate. He knew all the feelings of our infirmities, and more so for He suffered on behalf of His sheep. He suffered all the torments of hell on behalf of and in the place of His sheep.

The Good Shepherd gave His life for His sheep. He came for the lost sheep of the tribe of Israel. The Pharisees were not lost in their own eyes; they were all saved. He came for repentant ones, made to see they have offended the Holy One of heaven and earth. Can you look at the blood-stained crown of thorns upon His brow, the whipped stripes upon His back, the nail prints in His hands and feet, and yet say, "I can save myself, my free will will merit it?"

Will you be blind and say, "As long as I do my best, as

8 The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

long as I don't hurt anyone, as long as I am approved by others, I may still be acceptable before God"? Oh, you are not acceptable before God; the best Pharisee shall not be able to stand before the holy God! All of our righteousnesses are filthy rags in the sight of a holy God.

Yet Jesus Christ, the Shepherd of His sheep, became a sheep like them. It was Jesus Christ who was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7). He went as a sheep to the slaughter that He might bear the sins of all His sheep that are lost.

Jesus Christ came for sinners, for those who say with Psalm 119:176: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

Of this Great Shepherd, 1 Peter 2:22-24 states: "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." This Shepherd loves His sheep with an everlasting love, and gave His life for His sheep, that they should not perish. As 1 Peter 2:25 says, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

It is this Shepherd who saw the multitudes and "was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

So the Shepherd perseveres for His sheep. He is moved with compassion for them. He suffers for them. He bears all for them, even their sin, and their punishment, that He might rescue His own from the slave market of sin. He does this on their behalf that they too might persevere with a life of gratitude for His great de-

Luke 15:3-5

9

liverance. His sheep in return gladly say to Him, "Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (Ps. 44:22).

It is a glad time, a time of rejoicing, when a sinner repents unto salvation. This then is our third thought.

III. A rejoicing rescue

The shepherd, when He finds the sheep, our text says, "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." A sheep that has gone astray will never return on its own. The shepherd, tired and weary from the journey to find his lost sheep, still lifts this lost sheep and puts it upon his shoulders.

It is said that when a lost sheep is found, it will lie down helplessly and refuse to budge. The shepherd is forced to carry that animal over a long distance. Yet, knowing that much hard work is ahead of him, he rejoices.

Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, moved only by His everlasting love and sovereign good pleasure, delights in bringing many sons to repentance. David would not have returned had not God sent Nathan to him saying, "Thou art the man." Peter had gone astray in denying his Lord, "he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak," when he was identified by a maid (Mark 14:71). He also would not have repented had not the "Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61). It was then that he went out and "wept bitterly."

Oh, when a child of God has sinned against his Lord, and he is convicted of his sin by that look of love by Christ, he cannot do otherwise! His heart is melted into bitter tears of lamentation. His eyes are opened to see he has offended his loving Shepherd! He realizes that he deserves all the punishments of hell.

When he knows by experience his guilt for sin, his just condemnation due him, and he finds that holy, pre-

10 The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

cious Shepherd covering his sin, paying his debt, enduring his denials, his failures, his selfish neglect, he cannot but repent. It is a godly sorrow unto repentance, not to be repented of. It is the goodness of God that leads him to repentance.

This brings great delight and rejoicing to the Shepherd. If it brings such rejoicing, can you not repent? If His love is bestowed upon you, can you remain in your sins? Can you continue in your rebellion?

You may say, how do I know if His love is bestowed upon me? How do I know that I am not as the ninety and nine that were left?

Well, let me ask you, “Do you feel yourself a sinner hopelessly lost in all that you are and do?” Do you detest the utter thought of being as one of those self-righteous ninety and nine, content with your self-righteousness? Do you agree with your just condemnation and well deserved punishment in hell for your sins? Are you lost, and do you see that you are as a hell-worthy Pharisee? Does it disturb you greatly that you are lost and estranged from God?

The Good Shepherd seeks His own. Can you live another moment without Him? Christ seeks after each sinner, and when He finds him, He gives Himself to that one as if it were the only one He should rescue. He lifts that sheep up from the earth where it has fallen and puts it upon His heavenly shoulders.

The Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, proves His love by His actions. The weight of the sheep is upon the shoulders of the Shepherd. He bears it up. In His incarnation, coming to earth, taking to Himself humanity, He came after His lost sheep. In His life lived here on earth, He continued to seek out His lost sheep. In His death He laid the sheep upon His shoulders, bearing the weight of all its sin. In His resurrection, He gives it justification and life. In His ascension, He brings it home rejoicing,

Luke 15:3-5

11

and continues to intercede on its behalf at the right hand of the throne of God.

Oh, what glorious rejoicing this is! He has found His sheep which was lost! Notice that “when He found it” He rejoiced. He put it upon His shoulders. That is a great burden indeed to bear but the great Shepherd bore it! The Shepherd joyfully puts it upon His shoulders, as if to exclaim, “I am glad to have it on My shoulders.”

A great sorrow was upon Christ when He bore the burden of His people’s sins, but a greater joy flashed into His mind when He considered the redemption He would bring for His sheep. That day of salvation, when a wretched sinner repents, is a day of rejoicing for the Great Shepherd.

He comes home and calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, “Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

This is how it is in heaven; there is great rejoicing over one sinner that repents. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray and to sin against God. We all have done this. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” They that be ill need a physician. It is with publicans and sinners that Jesus eats and dines.

It is better to be scoffed at and mocked by the Pharisees of this world while angels rejoice than to gain the whole world and lose your soul. Many from this earth shall scorn the righteous justified in Christ, but such a conversion fills heaven with joy.

This parable leaves us with the question, “Have we repented ourselves?” God is not impressed with lip service when there is no converted life service.

Smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall flee was the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7 fulfilled. Jesus Christ referred to this prophecy in Matthew 26:31, and it was fulfilled when He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. But when Christ arrived, the false shepherds, such as the scribes and Pharisees, had scattered

12 The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

much of the flock. They were the hirelings that cared not for the flock.

Ezekiel 34:11 tells us, "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out." The Lord leads His sheep and feeds them by His Word and Spirit. He carries them away on eagle wings from the pollution of this world.

We have scattered ourselves from the Shepherd by our sins, but to those that are found in Him, there is much rejoicing. "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations" (Ps. 79:13).

To the ninety and nine that needed no repentance because they thought themselves to be sheep, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. On that great day of days when the Great Shepherd shall come for His sheep, there will be the judgment, and at this judgment, "He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:32).

Then shall we see the true possessors and the false professors. Then there shall be joy in heaven over the one sinner that repented, more than over the ninety and nine, which need no repentance.

Then the ninety and nine shall repent, but it shall be too late. They shall cry out but their time shall be past. As Proverbs 1:28 says of the one who has sinned away his day of grace, "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

Then they shall call unto the mountains and rocks, and say, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16-17).

Lost ones, repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, before it is forever too late! Amen.