

“When Peaceful It Is Easy, But Not When Anxiety and Fright Come”

St. Luke 15:1-10

June 28, 2020

SERMON 1922

by Michael David Henson

Our sermon text is from Luke 15:6, “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today’s parable of the Shepherd of a hundred sheep, who seeks after one lost and straying, is **a picture which we need to engrave in our conscience**. By our thoughts and words and deeds we daily stray away from the flock. We have left behind our Good Shepherd and the flock of Christ’s church, only to find that we are lost.

When times are peaceful, it is easy to think of our Christ as this Shepherd who loves us so much that He is willing to search high and low for us. He does not want us to be separated from His church. He does not want us to live in fear of the wolf and worried for the future. When life is going well and the sun is shining brightly, we don’t even consider the possibility that the storm clouds will come. Our feelings and emotions are happy. Our thoughts are pleasant and we look forward to eternal life. Of course, Jesus is the Savior, our Good Shepherd, and I am his sheep.

But then, the skies begin to threaten. My happy-go-lucky life encounters distress and difficulty. The warning sirens makes you wonder if you are truly ready for the storm. The present situation reveals that you haven’t done nearly enough in the past. Your past sinful actions are now glaringly obvious. You are weak and aren’t ready for the battle. When you look around, you now realize that the other sheep are no longer to be found. Where are you? You are lost.

And here is where things get even worse. Your own thoughts and perceptions tell you that the situation is hopeless. This crisis makes you doubt whether God is really watching over you. You tell yourself that you must change yourself and make things right, and only then can you return to the flock. But your heart is a liar!

God desires your return right now and He is willing to forgive, but you have come to see things differently. You tell yourself that God would not take you back now. First, you must make things right. When you see the Shepherd coming for you, you hide because you tell yourself that He really wants to punish you. You are sure that He is hunting down his lost and erring sheep to give it its due. You view God, the church, even the Word of God with anxiety and fright.

You have constructed a whole new picture of Christ and his intentions for you, the lost sheep. And it is not the correct one! The devil has no doubt had his part in getting you to doubt and falter in your Christian faith. He would rather you not think about the Shepherd seeking the one sheep. But if you must remember it, Satan has twisted the meaning so that he can use it.

Similarly, Satan told Eve that God was keeping back, something good from her. He said that this forbidden fruit would not bring death, it will open your eyes and make you like God knowing good and evil. The word of God hadn't changed. God's will toward Adam and Eve hadn't changed. Instead the devil had so clouded her vision that she trusted in the faulty construction which now dwelt in her own feeble heart.

I can't count how many unbelievers have told me that if they came to church, the roof would collapse. I don't think that they meant it literally, but **it does show the fear that has overtaken them.** God and His Word, even other believers are just too scary. They fear that their sin will be exposed.

There is also a fear of being without my sin. Those who have lived with their sin for some time have become quite comfortable with it. Though they complain about the guilt and anxiety, they can't imagine a life without it. The drunk doesn't like the consequences, but he actually fears having to live life sober.

We need this parable of the Shepherd of a hundred sheep who seeks after one lost and straying. It is **a picture which we need to engrave in our conscience.** It is easy to remember it correctly, when times are peaceful, but not when disaster hits and we find that we lost. Though they didn't understand the forgiving love of God, the Pharisees got it right when they said, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Furthermore, Jesus tells the parable of the Shepherd seeking the lost sheep in order to underline the truth which they had uttered. Jesus does receive sinners and eats with them.

If a shepherd's concern is so great that He would seek after even one sheep that was lost. Our God is not any less concerned for little old you. He is willing to go to great lengths so that you might be returned to the flock safe and sound.

First, always remember that God loves you so much that He is seeking you His sheep. The presence of a disaster or crisis is not a reason to doubt His love. The unexpected loss of a family member or friend is not a reason to think God has pushed you away. If you come to realize that you have sinned, even greatly, this does not mean that God no longer desires your company. God loves each and every sheep. He is willing to seek and save even one sheep. He cares for you.

Second, God is seeking you in order to save you. He is sending out his law so that you realize your sin. He is sending out the announcement of the forgiveness of sins so that your sin might be wiped away. God is seeking you, not to punish, but to save you. After God came walking in the garden in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve hid from God out of fear. They did not need to fear. He was seeking to save them. Even God's question to Adam, "Where are you?" was intended to open Adam's eyes to his sin. Until Adam saw his sin, Adam would not receive the Shepherd's seeking to save him.

Listen carefully, not every bad thing that happens is a result of our sin. Sometimes it is just the circumstance of living in a fallen world. **But, there are times that we experience the consequence of our sins.** What I mean is that sometimes bad happens to us, and we realize that it was the result of our own sin. Make mammon your idol, and your marriage and family will suffer. Lie and deceive and you will lose your job or have to pay the fine. Despise preaching and the Word, and you will not be able to withstand temptation. Live selfishly, and you will find that you have few friends.

If you do realize that you are being punished for your sin, do not despair. Our Savior Shepherd is seeking you to forgive you. **Like the prodigal son, there are times**

when God uses the consequences in order to bring us to our senses. Like dumb sheep, God knows that sometimes it takes harsh action to get our attention. It is better to enter life with one eye, then to go to hell with two eyes. God loves you so much that He will go to great lengths in order to bring you from lost to found.

Third, engrave that parable in your mind. “And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing” (v.5). When you realize that you are lost, it is time to trust in your good Shepherd. You don’t need to right the wrong or fix what you have ruined. The Lord has come with forgiveness. All that is in the past is forgiven. You don’t need the strength to return. **He will carry you on His shoulders.** You don’t need to know the way back. He is the way and the truth and the life.

Fourth, the one who has found you is rejoicing! He absolutely delights in forgiving you your sins and in restoring you to his flock, the church. Your Shepherd rejoices in giving you a new birth in Holy Baptism. He will provide you with forgiveness and strength to face the days ahead.

Fifth, the only thing which the Lord asks of you His restored sheep is this: Rejoice with me. **He is rejoicing in saving us, and now He wants us, his sheep, to rejoice in Him saving us.** It sounds too good to be true, but it is not. He does not need anything that we have. For He has given us everything. He desires that we live lives of thankfulness in praise of Him, who alone accomplished our salvation.

God’s mind is made-up. He desires all men to be saved. He desires that each and every lost sheep be found by the Shepherd and returned. He desires to save you. The Lord has graciously published His message of salvation in His Word. He has called prophets, apostles and pastors to preach his message of good news. Jesus Christ has suffered and died to take away your sins.

This parable of the lost sheep being found by the shepherd is the message you need. It is a message which you must apply to yourself. You will find yourselves lost and hearing His voice seeking you, you must rejoice in his salvation. This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them.

It will not be difficult to remember God’s desire to find you when times are peaceful. You may say to yourself that this picture of God is only too easy and you know it all too well. Do not become so prideful that you cease to rejoice in his salvation. “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7). Our loving God is not done telling us this story and we should not close our ears to hearing it.

This good news comes in many ways and in many stories. Recently it has come in John 3, with Jesus seeking to save Nicodemus as He tells him that he must be born again of water and the Word. It has come in Luke 16, by the Lord’s desire to save Lazarus who was poor, crippled, and begging food of the unbelieving rich man. Lazarus was loved by God and taken to Abraham’s bosom. It had come in Luke 14 by God’s invitation to the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind. No matter who or what you have done, our God desires to forgive you your sins and bring you to the heavenly banquet.

Why is God so repetitious? He know that you will need to remember it when things become difficult and hard. You will need to remember it when you are filled with fear and anxiety. You will need to remember it when your sins cry out to the sky and

the devil twisting your ear. You will need to remember it when God humbles you under His mighty hand.

Finally, our Lord Jesus Christ has left us a memorial of His love. For those who have been lost, but now are found, Jesus has instituted a meal of forgiveness. He gives us His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. This meal cannot be bought or earned. It is a reminder of His great love for us. Our Lord said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." We eat and drink so that we teach ourselves to receive His forgiveness. We do it to teach ourselves that the Savior who has found His lost sheep desires that I receive His heavenly banquet. St. Paul tells us, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, till he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

How do we proclaim His death which saves us? We receive the Lord's Supper with rejoicing. "And when he has found the sheep, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" (Luke 15:5-6). Having brought us home to His church, he desires to eat this meal with us that we may rejoice together. Engrave this picture in your conscience: the Shepherd seeks after me, his lost and straying sheep.