

**Lost and Found**

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus to hear him. <sup>2</sup>But the Pharisees and the experts in the law were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup>He told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>“Which one of you, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls together his friends and his neighbors, telling them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’ <sup>7</sup>I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent. <sup>8</sup>“Or what woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, would not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup>In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

—Luke 15:1-10

The grandsons and granddaughters of my brother have about 25-30 sheep and enter many of them in the local County Fair and the State Fair. They receive many blue ribbons and often the Grand Champion ribbon. But the shepherd that Jesus spoke about had 100 sheep. And these sheep were not in pens or in barns but out in pastures on the open range. But one of them strays and becomes lost. The shepherd amazingly knows the sheep so well and individually that he knows not only that a sheep has strayed but also, he knows which one. What will that shepherd do? He has a large number of sheep. He could say to himself, “So what if one of the hundred goes astray? 99-100; what’s the difference? That’s the price of doing business. And I hate having to look for a confounded lost sheep.”

But no, not at all! That is not his attitude. He goes and looks for that sheep not simply because he wants to have 100 sheep in the flock but especially for the sake of that sheep. The shepherd had to seek to rescue it. That lost sheep was in danger and would not survive. There was the great danger of predators. A sheep cannot outrun a wolf or a lion or a bear, and it surely cannot defend itself. Of interest is that David who as a young lad tended sheep spoke about how he had killed both a lion and a bear that had attacked the sheep. Another danger is that the lost sheep would try to drink water from a swift flowing stream and fall in. Yes, sheep can swim for a little while but as the water quickly soaks into their wool it makes them so heavy that they drown. You know the words of Psalm 23 where it says that our shepherd leads us by still waters, not just waters but still waters.

Our Lord Jesus was speaking not really about sheep that strayed from the flock but about people who have strayed from the Christian flock. If a shepherd were to seek a lost sheep, should not above all a lost soul be sought? That brings us to the question, Who is lost? By nature all of us! The whole world is lost. Jesus said that He came to this world to seek and to save that which was lost. Some of you memorized the Meaning of the Second Article of the Apostles Creed about Jesus: “Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature.” Many of know that the word lost is contained in the hymn “Amazing Grace”.

Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see.

The words of Jesus especially and directly apply to a person who at one time was a member of His flock but no longer is. That person at one time was repentant and believed in Jesus but then he strayed from the Lord and became lost. Who is lost? For one thing, it is one who is not repentant of sin. The word repentance is a key word in this section. Lost is one who no longer has a saving faith in Jesus. A sign of being lost is that the person no longer follows the Good Shepherd’s direction about hearing His Word and receiving communion for the preserving and strengthening of faith.

Sometimes a person who has strayed will say that he still has faith. But He might be fooling himself. Is it a living faith or a dead faith? Here are some cautions from the book of James. “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.” Then James went on to say that even the devils are not atheists. They know and believe that Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world but obviously they do not have saving faith. A person living in an adulterous relationship said, “But I still believe and love Jesus.” Jesus Himself says, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15)

It is dangerous and disastrous to stray from the Lord. It means eternal condemnation. Most of you know the beautiful words of John 3:16 but listen to what John 3:18 says, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed.” The following statement is usually not used in polite conversation but it does express a truth – “As sure as hell.” The same Bible that speaks about heaven also

speaks about hell. Jesus Himself spoke about hell. Wishing that hell did not exist does not make it go away, Hell has not frozen over. If there is no hell, from what, pray tell, did Jesus save us? If there is no hell, why did Jesus put Himself through all that agony and disgrace? The devil wants people to believe there is no hell. He wants people to be lost.

Maybe you know a person or two who has strayed from faith and is not repenting of sin. Maybe in some cases it is a dear family member – and it breaks your heart. You ache for that person. You realize the eternal danger in which that person is. But don't give up hope. We don't want you to grasp at straws but let's look at five things that gave reason for hope.

The first one is this. The good news is that your Good Shepherd wants that person brought back to repentance and faith and into His flock. He does not want that person to be lost. He continues to love that person. He does not have the 'see if I care attitude.' The Apostle Peter wrote, "The Lord is patient and does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Secondly, The Lord has entrusted to all of us the responsibility of the search and rescue mission of the lost. Some of you have hiked in the back country with a group of hikers, Now let's suppose that you left the trail and you became lost. That can be very frightening. But suppose no one came looking for you. No effort was made to find you. They all returned to their cars, knowing that you were missing, but they all drove off and did not contact anyone. Where is their love? Where is their concern? That would be devastating. But now suppose someone in a group of Christians – let's say a congregation – becomes lost spiritually. If I should be the one straying from the Lord by being involved in an impenitent sin, I hope you would care enough for me to seek to bring me back to the Lord. I would hope my family members would say something. I would want you and them to do whatever you could to lead me back. I don't want to end up eternally lost. I think you would feel the same way as I do should you be the one straying.

In our congregation much of the search and rescue mission for those who are straying has been entrusted to the shepherds, who are your pastors, along with the elders. Continue to encourage them and pray for them. But if someone you know well has strayed from Jesus, you seek to speak to that person. Take the opportunity; make the opportunity; pray for the right opportunity to speak. Plead, warn, encourage but be careful of 'nag, nag, nag'. Speak with an attitude of love and concern. The Lord tells us, "Speak the truth in love." The shepherd looking for the lost sheep wasn't cussing; he wasn't yelling, "If I ever find you, I am going to kick the dickens out of you." So it is with you. You can and should be firm but also gentle.

Sometimes the lost one does not want to hear or accept that message and might get angry at you, the messenger. It is especially hurtful if it is a family member. Then remember part of a hymn verse from "Now the Light Has Gone Away." "Let my near and dear ones be Always near and dear to Thee" (not necessarily near and dear to me but near and dear to Thee). Although I would not like it and it would be hurtful if a lost family member would despise me for admonishing him, I would much rather have him return to the Lord. We can hug each other in heaven.

A third thing - Pray for those who are lost. I have a feeling that when we have a moment of silent prayer in our church service, many of us adults are praying for a wayward family member – a spouse, a son, a daughter, a grandchild, a brother or a sister who have strayed from the Lord and are lost. Don't give up praying.

Do you know about the woman after whom the California city Santa Monica was named? It was Monica, a pious and dedicated mother who lived in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century in northern Africa. She had a son who strayed from the Lord into unbelief and all sorts of adulterous affairs. He had a mistress with whom he had a child. He mockingly uttered the famous prayer to God: "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet." For years he did not speak with his mother but Monica prayed and cried in prayer for 17 years. The Lord answered that prayer. Her son converted back to Christianity. Her son's name was Augustine who became a pillar of the early Christian Church. Pray for the lost. Do not give up.

A fourth reason for hope! The seeds of God's Word that were planted at one time in the heart of the person who has strayed might once again sprout and bring that person back to the Lord. An example of that comes from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is a true story of a mother, named Elizabeth. She had one child, a son named John. Her husband was an unbeliever, a sailor. Elizabeth carefully and persistently instructed her son in the truths of God's Word, pointing out sin but also and especially the Savior from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ. Elizabeth died from tuberculosis at the age of 27 which was 2 weeks before her son John's 7<sup>th</sup> birthday. John grew up to be a wild teen. He became involved in sailing ships and then became involved in capturing African men and selling them as slaves. "I sinned with a high hand," he later wrote, "and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others." But later on the seeds of God's Word planted by his mother sprouted. He awakened to the terrible things he was doing and looked to God's grace for forgiveness. His name was John Newton and it was he who authored the well-known hymn, Amazing Grace in which he wrote, "I once was lost but now am found." Some of the seeds of God's Word planted years ago and some that you now plant may sprout not right away but some years later in the heart of one who became lost.

A fifth reason for hope! The Lord might bring about a circumstance in the life of the straying which will bring him back. Now to the 20<sup>th</sup> century! It was my Uncle Clarence who had been brought up with the Word of God. He attended the Lutheran Grade School. He was confirmed. He married a devout Lutheran woman. They had a family of four children. But Uncle Clarence strayed. He left his family; he left the community. He left the church. Family members lovingly spoke with him. He sometimes replied, "God, who needs Him?" "Church?" And Uncle Clarence used the same lame duck excuses and accusations that the devil has been supplying for years. "Church? They're a bunch of hypocrites. It's all politics anyhow." But God used something to bring Uncle Clarence to his senses. It was cancer. And Uncle Clarence came back to the Lord, repenting of sin and trusting Jesus for forgiveness.

We used examples from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now don't give up hope in this 21<sup>st</sup> century in connection with someone who is lost. That man or that woman might be found and brought back to the Lord. When that does happen, rejoice. After the shepherd found the lost sheep, he rejoiced. Remember the amazing words that Jesus said, "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."