

Seeking the one lost sheep -

*“For He is our God (Elohim - Mighty One), and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep (flock) of His hand, **Today, if ye will hear His Voice . . . !**”* Psalm 95:7

As Jesus was teaching, the publicans and sinners continued to gather about Him, as in His earlier ministry in Galilee, and the same murmur of discontent was heard from the scribes and Pharisees,--“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them . . .” Matthew 9:10-13

By this accusation they thought to make the false impression that Jesus loved the association of those who were sinful and vile, and was insensible to their wickedness. The rabbis were disappointed that One Who pretended to the world so lofty a character, did not mingle with them and follow their methods of teaching, rather than go about in so unpretending a manner, working among all classes of people. It angered those decorous guardians of society that He with Whom they felt themselves continually in antagonism should meet, in such apparent sympathy, with publicans and sinners. It angered them also that these outcast classes, who manifested only contempt for the rabbis, and who were never seen in the synagogues, yet flocked about Jesus, and listened with rapt attention to His Words

While the scribes and Pharisees felt only condemnation in that pure Presence, how was it, they questioned, that publicans and sinners were attracted to Him? They knew not that the explanation lay in the very words they had uttered as a scornful charge, “This Man receiveth sinners . . .” **It was because** the souls who came to Jesus, however sinful, **felt that He offered them hope**. In His Presence they felt that even for them there was escape from the pit of sin. While the Pharisees had only scorn and condemnation for them . . .

Jesus greeted them as children of God. **And their very misery and sin** made them only the more the objects of His compassion. The farther they had wandered from Him, the more earnest the longing and the greater the sacrifice for their rescue . . . !

All this the teachers of Israel might have learned from the sacred scrolls of which it was their pride to be the keepers and expounders. Had not David written, --David, who had fallen into deadly sin, --“**I have gone astray like a lost sheep**; seek thy servant.” Psalm 119:176.

Had not Micah revealed God's love to the sinner, saying, “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity (perversity, mischief), and passeth by the transgression (rebellion, apostasy) of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy !”

Micah 7:18

Jesus did not, however, remind them of the Words of Scripture. He appealed to the witness of their own daily experience, that even in this world, men put forth greatest effort and manifest most solicitude for that which is in danger of harm and loss.

The wide-spreading table-lands on the east of Jordan afforded abundant pasturage for flocks; and through the gorges and over the wooded hills had wandered many a lost sheep, to be searched for and brought back by the shepherd's care. In the company about Jesus there were shepherds, and also men who had money invested in flocks and herds; and all could appreciate the illustration He used when He said “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 ?” Matthew 18:12

These souls whom you despise as worthless, said Jesus, are the property of God. They are His by creation and by Redemption, and they are of value in His sight ! They are the objects of His care and love. As the shepherd loves his sheep, and **cannot rest if one be missing**, **So**, in an infinitely higher degree, **does God love every outcast and wandering soul !**

Men may deny the claim of His love, they may wander far from Him, they may choose for themselves another master, yet are they God's, and He longs to recover His own. And He (Jesus) says, "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; **So will I seek out My sheep, and I will deliver them** out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day !"

Ezekiel 34:12 & John 10:25

O soul lost in sin, however far you have wandered, into whatever depths of degradation and misery you have sunken, God recognizes you as His Own, precious to His heart of love. You cannot be safe or happy without Him, and **He cannot be satisfied without you**. Amid the angels that surround the throne, He still yearns to recover you !

The sheep that has strayed from the fold, is the most helpless of all animals. If the wanderer is not sought for by the Compassionate Shepherd, it will not find its way back. The shepherd must take it in his arms, and himself bear it to the fold. **So with the soul** that has wandered away from God. He is as helpless as the poor lost sheep; and unless Divine love had come to his rescue, he would never find his way to God.

The shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing, does not look carelessly over his flock, and say, "I have ninety and nine, and it will cost me too much trouble to go and search for the straying one. Let him come back, and I will open the door of the sheep-fold that he may come in . . . but I cannot go after him."

No sooner does the sheep go astray, than the countenance of the Shepherd is filled with grief and anxiety. He counts and recounts the flock; and when He is certain that one sheep is lost, **He slumbers not**. He leaves the ninety and nine within the fold, and goes forth in search of the straying sheep. The darker and more tempestuous the night, the more perilous and unpleasant the way, the longer and more tedious the service, the greater the Shepherd's anxiety, and the more earnest His search. **He does not weary, He does not falter until the lost is found !**

Often when the bewildered sheep hears the shepherd's call, it flees from the one who is trying to effect its rescue. **But the true shepherd wearies not**; with assuring Words . . . "*For the Words that I speak unto you _____ (your name), they are Spirit, and they are Life !*" John 6:63

He pursues the wandering one, and when at last He comes upon it in a thicket or a treacherous swamp, **He does not beat it as it frantically struggles to get free**, but with careful hand He parts the briers or pulls it from the slough; with tender caress He calms its fears. He encircles the trembling, exhausted creature in His strong arms, He lays it upon His shoulder, and with gratitude that His search has not been in vain, **He bears the wanderer back to the fold !**

Thank God, there is no picture presented to our imagination, of a sorrowful shepherd returning without the sheep. **Here is the Divine guarantee that not even one** of the straying sheep and lambs of God's fold is overlooked, and not one is left unsuccored. Every one that will submit (surrender their will) to be ransomed, Jesus will rescue from the pit of corruption, and from the briers of sin. Let every desponding, distrustful soul take courage, even though you have done wickedly

You are not to think that *perhaps* God will pardon your transgressions, and permit you to approach into His Presence; but you are to remember that it is God Who has made the first advance, that **He has come forth to seek you while still you were in rebellion against Him**. With the tender heart of the Shepherd He has left the ninety and nine, and gone out into the wilderness to seek His wandering one. The soul, bruised and wounded and ready to perish, He encircles in His arms of love, and joyfully bears it to the haven of safety.

It was taught by the Jews that before the favor of God is extended to the sinner, He must first repent. In their view, repentance is a work which men are to accomplish of themselves, by which to earn the favor of heaven. And it was this thought that moved the Pharisees to exclaim in astonishment and anger, “**This man receiveth sinners.**” According to their ideas He should permit to approach Him those only who had repented of their sins.

But Jesus teaches that Salvation (deliverance, rescue, freedom, healing and restoration) **does not come through our seeking after God, but through God’s seeking after us** (John 15:16). Repentance is born (begotten) in the heart by beholding the love of Christ, Who gave *up* His Life to save the sinner. It is the goodness of God, manifested in Christ, that softens the heart. It is the virtue (Spirit) that goes forth from Jesus **that inspires the purpose of the soul to turn away from sin**. We do not repent in order that God may love us, but God reveals His love to us that we may repent. Thus repentance is not the ground of God's love toward us, but the fruit of that love.

“For God commendeth His love toward us, in that . . . while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us !”
Romans 5:6-11

When the straying sheep is at last brought home, the shepherd's gratitude finds expression in melodious songs of rejoicing, and he calls upon his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, “**Rejoice with me; for I have found My sheep which was lost.**” So when a wanderer is found by the great Shepherd of the sheep, heavenly choirs respond to the Shepherd's note of joy. When the lost is found, heaven and earth unite in thanksgiving and rejoicing. “**Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.**” Luke 15:4-10

*“The LORD thy God in the midst (heart) of thee is Mighty . . . He will save! He will rejoice over thee _____
_____ (your name) with joy; He will rest in His love, and He will joy over thee with singing !”*
Zephaniah 3:14-18

You, Pharisees, said Jesus, regard yourselves as the favorites of heaven. You feel that you need no repentance. Know, then, that if you have no need, My mission is not to you. **I have come to seek and to save that which was lost**; and these poor souls who feel their poverty and sinfulness, are the very ones whom I have come to rescue. Angels of heaven are interested in these lost ones whom you despise. You complain and sneer when one of these souls joins himself to Me; but know that angels rejoice, and the song of triumph and gladness rings through the courts above.

The rabbis had a saying that there is rejoicing in heaven when those who have sinned against God are destroyed. But I tell you, said Jesus, that to God the work of destruction is a strange work. That in which all heaven delights is the restoration to God's Own Image, of the souls whom He has made !

When a soul that has wandered far in sin, seeks to return to God, he will encounter the criticism and distrust of those who are always ready to censure and accuse. They will doubt whether his repentance is genuine, or will whisper, “He has no stability; I do not believe he will hold out.” **These men are doing**, not the work of God, but **the work of Satan**, who is the accuser of the brethren. Through their criticisms, the enemy of our souls hopes to discourage these wandering ones, and to drive them still farther from hope and from God.

Let the troubled and sin-sick soul contemplate the rejoicing of heaven over the return of the one that was lost; **let him rest** (trust) in the love of God, and in no case be intimidated by the indifference, the contempt and scorn of the scribes and Pharisees.

The rabbis understood Christ's parable as applying to the publicans and sinners; but it has also a wider meaning of which they had no conception. By the lost sheep, Christ represents, not only the individual sinner, but the one world that had apostatized and had been ruined by sin. The inhabitants of all other worlds are loyal and true to God; but He will not permit this one lost sheep to perish.

The God of heaven is not unmindful of the world and its concerns. Jesus in heaven, One with God (*ekh-awd* - Deuteronomy 6:4-5 & John 17:21), the loved Commander in the heavenly courts, had stooped from His high estate, laid aside the glory that He had with the Father, in order to save the one lost world. **For this He** left the sinless worlds on high, the ninety and nine that loved Him, and **came to this earth**, to be “wounded for our transgressions,” and “bruised (beaten repeatedly), for our iniquities . . . !” Isaiah 53:3-12

*“But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,
Ere He found His sheep that was lost . . . !”*

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us . . . !” I John 3:1

“For God so loved this world that He gave *up* His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him (the Word that was made flesh, and dwelt among us), should not perish, but have everlasting Life!” And Jesus says, “As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world,”--to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, . . . for His body's sake, which is the church.”

John 3:16; 17:18; Colossians 1:24.

To every soul whom Christ has **rescued from the pit of sin**, be he old or young, parent or child, He has committed a trust to work in His name for the saving (deliverance, rescue, freedom, healing and restoration) of the lost. This work had been neglected in Israel, even by the shepherds of the flock. **Is it not neglected today** among those who profess to be followers of Christ? How many of the wandering and lost have you, O reader, sought for and brought back to the fold? When you turn away from those who seem (in your eyes as) unpromising and unattractive, do you realize that you are neglecting souls for whom Jesus is seeking?

Perhaps at the very moment when you have turned from them, they were in the greatest need of your tenderness and compassion. **Many who appear hard and reckless** are allowed to drift on to ruin, for the want of a helping hand stretched out to save them. Had these erring, neglected ones received the same advantages that others have had, they might have revealed far more nobility of soul, and greater talent for usefulness than do many who have been watched over day and night with gentlest care and overflowing love.

Angels pity these wandering ones; angels weep, while human eyes are dry, and human hearts are closed to pity. O, there is a lack of deep, earnest, soul-touching sympathy and love for the tempted and the erring. We need far more of Christ's Spirit, and far less of self.

When a human life is in danger, what sacrifices men are ready to make! They stop at no risk, they grudge no effort and no cost that will save the imperiled life. Of how much more value is that life which measures with (which could be purchased and redeemed only by) the Life of God !

If we are Christians, and not mere pretenders, shall we not be far more earnest and interested to rescue the soul than to save the body?

Who can estimate the value of a soul?

Go to Gethsemane, and there watch with Jesus through those long hours of anguish when He sweat as it were great drops of blood (wrestling against sin); look upon the Saviour uplifted on the cross; hear that despairing cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Look upon that wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that Christ risked all; **“tempted like as we are,”** He staked even His Own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our Redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for *only one* sinner Jesus would have yielded up His Life, we may estimate the value of a soul.

If you are in communion with Christ, you will place His estimate upon men; you will feel for others the same anxiety, the same deep love that He has felt for you !

Then you will be able to win, not drive, to attract, not repulse, **the souls for whom Christ died.** You will guard and care for the sheep and lambs of His fold. Not one soul would ever have been brought back to the fold, if Christ had not made a personal effort to save that which was lost; and it is by this personal effort that you can rescue souls.

If they stray, you will not, cannot rest in quiet indifference and ease. You will leave the ninety and nine that are within the fold, and will go out to seek the lost. You will work with the same tender care, the same untiring energy that the Master showed. **The greater their sin and the deeper their misery, the more earnest and tender and determined will be your efforts for them.** Every earthly and selfish interest will be swallowed up in the longing to rescue these souls.

You will discern the need of those who are suffering, who have been sinning against God, and who are oppressed by a burden of guilt. Your heart will go out in sympathy for them, and you will reach out a helping hand to lift the poor souls out of the slough of despair in which their feet are sinking.

In the arms of your faith and love, you will bear them back to the fold. You will watch over and encourage them, and your sympathy and confidence will make it hard for them to fall from their steadfastness. All heaven is ready to cooperate with you in this work. The Salvation of the lost is the object of most intense interest to the heavenly hosts, and **the angels will aid you** in your efforts to reach the hearts of the most careless and the most hardened !

And when the lost is found and brought back to the fold, your songs of joy will unite with the rejoicing of the family above.

*“While all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
Shall rise the cry to the gate of heaven,
'Rejoice, I have found my sheep!'
And the angels echo around the throne,
'Rejoice, for the Lord brings back his own!’”*

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