

Bible Class The Parable of the Lost Sheep**Matthew 18:10-14****17th October '24**

The passage under consideration is as follows:

10 Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and goes into the mountains, and seeks that which is gone astray?

13 And if so be that he find it, truly I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Context

Earlier the disciples had been asking who was greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus in his response showed that such a question was

inappropriate, that being great in the Kingdom was not important, but that being IN the Kingdom at all was what was most important. That the idea of being great should be far from the minds of disciples, instead humility and a realistic understanding of what we are actually like is preferred to dreams of grandeur and greatness.

So by way of illustration *Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, he emphasised the point by saying Except you be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Therefore the likelihood of being great in the Kingdom was dependant upon the readiness to be humble in this life now. To be as little children that is:

- Readiness to listen
- Quick to learn
- Respectful to others
- Eager to please
- Innocent of craftiness
- Lack cynicism and negativity
- Have not developed an ego and pride

How quick these fresh and clean features become sullied, scarred and spoilt by sin, which corrupts, corrodes and decays the virtue of youth.

The Lord taught strongly that he expected his disciples to adopt that childlike disposition, by converting, and repenting from a former way of life, and being humble. The opposite attitude – being pompous proud and opinionated, holding oneself in high esteem, would in fact drive away the little ones- which indeed is what the disciples attempted to do see and such attitudes not only are an offense to God but cause offence to those of a simple and straightforward disposition and who are already humble and drives them away.

Jesus then speaks of the parable of the lost sheep. Who is he speaking about? The little ones who have been driven away by the bad shepherding of the pompous and proud? Is he speaking about the wayward sheep, who well, deserve everything they get, it is their fault they wander off, not like us, who are always faithful and stay in the fold!! – well, at least that seems to be the attitude of some we come across from time to time.

Using the context, we see that Jesus is teaching the great valuable need to be humble. Being humble then, the parable of the lost sheep can in fact rightly apply to everyone of us! Novices, elders, brothers, sisters. It can apply to the nation of Israel too, which we will briefly look at.

Looking at Verse 10 – the first verse for consideration:

Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

[just an aside here... this verse has been used many times to assert that every believer has a specially allocated angel to look after them. It may be the case. But it is adding to scripture to say this verse is stating that, as it can be interpreted in various ways.]

Don't despise these little ones, is the advice, they are being looked after and watched...

So! Who are these little ones?

It could be those who are literally little – young in age, and coming to learn about scripture. It could be novices, those recently baptised. It could be those who are troubled, and confused, though have been baptised for many years, that is going through personal difficulties, and so are momentarily less capable than others.

This last suggestion is highlighted by the Apostles: For example Romans 14:1-3: (NET) *Now receive the one who is weak in the faith,*

and do not have disputes over differing opinions. One person believes in eating everything, but the weak person eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not despise the one who does not, and the one who abstains must not judge the one who eats everything, for God has accepted him. See care and kindness is the watchword, leaving opinions behind... there are those we might think are weak in faith.. ha! But in fact might well be stronger in faith than ourselves! so let us tread very carefully when judging another... see also Romans 14:10,13-15,21. Paul continues to speak of those who are 'weak'

Romans 15:1 *We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.* "Oooh! I am strong" we may think, "not weak in the faith, I'm not the type to wander off like a lost sheep!" But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:22 *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* Paul forces us to think carefully.

Let us think of someone else. Who was strong, powerful, mighty.

1 Samuel 15:17 *And Samuel said, When you were little in your own sight, were you not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?* – Speaking of Saul. Yes, when we think we are strong we are weak. But when we see ourselves as little in God's eyes, and not very important at all, then perhaps we are nearer to being saved. Far from thinking we are experienced and shepherd-like, the truth is as Isaiah states in 66:2: *but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.* For example the mighty and great preacher-the Apostle Paul said: 1 Timothy 1:15 *...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

So Jesus continued his speech: v11: ***For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.***

If we are not lost, we cannot be saved - is the simple truth. Jesus said it another way: Matthew 9:12-13...*he said unto them, They that be*

whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. ...for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

When Jesus did speak of those who were lost, he was speaking primarily of his own nation. This must be remembered. See Matthew 10:6 and 15:24: *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* And in another place: 9:36 *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*

There were many in Israel who did not consider themselves lost – the scoffing Sadducees, the fanatical Pharisees, the earnest Essenes, the zealous Zealots and other religious sects. They considered themselves the flock of God, and that the Messiah would come and give them the Kingdom. Instead, because they refused to repent - and convert and be as little children and actually listen to what the Scripture was saying, there was no way they could be saved. Jesus had to leave them to their own devices - Zechariah 7:11 *But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.*

So Jesus continued his parable talking to his disciples who were arguing who should be the greatest: **12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and goes into the mountains, and seeks that which is gone astray?**

Every sheep is valuable to a shepherd. If one wanders off it is his job to locate and secure it. The ninety and nine are safe, it is the one isolated and ready to be attacked by lurking wild animals that is vulnerable. Of course, Jesus was speaking metaphorically, and the point of the parable is reached in the next verse

13 And if so be that he find it, truly I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

The point of the parable is the joy of finding the lost sheep. Such an achievement of saving a lost sheep. It reminds of another passage... the parallel passage of the same parable in Luke 15:7 *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.*

This then interprets the parable for us, and explains what Jesus was teaching, whereas Matthew does not record this in the same way.

The 99 sheep are those who need no repentance, the lost sheep is the sinner who repents.

The 99 are those who think they are saved already – the vast majority who do not see a need for a Saviour – like the nation in Jesus' day. And of course like the majority in our own day.

But Jesus delivered the parable to his disciples because they were arguing about who was the greatest. This means that the disease of thinking we are the chosen people and are better than everyone else and are already saved, and doing just fine is one that affect those within the one flock within the true fold. Every sheep is capable – and indeed does wander off from time to time.

The man after God's own heart – David- confessed: Psalms 119:176: *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments. The prophet Isaiah on behalf of the whole nation: Isaiah 53:6: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...*

Buit even as Israel have been scattered because of their pride, they will be gathered again see Ezekiel 34:12 *As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.* See also Jeremiah 32:37-41 and 50:6.

As with the natural so with the spiritual. The joy in heaven over a few Gentiles, who tremble at the Word of God, and who are little in their own sight, and recognise that without the light and guidance of the Good Shepherd they will forever remain in the dark valley of the shadow of death. But the promise is Luke 12:32: *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

Salvation cannot ever be assumed, it is only guaranteed if we follow – we are in the process of being saved. At any moment we can be tempted by a distracting hole in the hedge or a fresh bunch of grass just off the path and wander off yet again!

The parable teaching to the disciples is: don't be proud and arrogant, be humble like a little child, and accept the truth that without repentance we are lost. It is our responsibility to continually remind of this, and help one another as Jesus told Peter the position of all is that

John 21:15 ... *Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.*

Brother Terry