

# SERMONS,

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BY

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## SERMON III.

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### THE LOST SHEEP BROUGHT HOME.

ST. LUKE XV. 4, 5, 6.—“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. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

THIS parable was spoken by our Lord in his own defence. His old enemies, the scribes and pharisees, had turned his condescension into a ground of attack on him. “This man,” said they, “receiveth sinners.” The charge was not repelled. With a silent dignity the patient Saviour admits its truth, passes over, as though unnoticed, the proud selfishness it manifested, and stoops down at once to justify the compassion it condemned. He appeals to the ordinary conduct of the people who surrounded him, conduct approved and followed by these very murmurers, and finds in that a triumphant vindication of his own.

And in doing this, he does more than this. He turns his weapon of defence into an instrument of mercy, silencing these Jews by words of which they were not worthy; words evidently intended for men of another spirit, and for another purpose; intended perhaps for some of you; designed to excite hope, and adoration, and joy, this very day in your hearts. They bring before us an object of peculiar need, and, at the same time, of peculiar care and mercy—a worthless sinner, recovered, saved, and carried joyfully to heaven, by the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The parable represents *his natural condition*. And what marvellous compassion breaks forth in the description given us of this! A veil is thrown over all that we might have expected to be most conspicuous in it. Not a word is said of man’s criminality or man’s pollution. The blessed Jesus appears to lose sight of both. He speaks as a father, forgetting, in the misery of his children, all their guilt. “Sinners,” said the Jews. “No,” says Christ, “lost sheep; poor, thoughtless wanderers from their home.”

The figure conveys to us three ideas.

1. The first is *want*; not absolute want perhaps, not complete destitution—for the rocky mountain may yield some food, and the sandy desert some refreshment; but the sheep is away from the fold; it has consequently no satisfying, no adequate, no certain pasture; it lives, if it lives at all, in hunger and weariness.

And what is our condition when at a distance from God? It is worse than the condition of this lost sheep, more necessitous and desolate. Regard us

indeed as no better than machines of flesh and blood, creatures with no higher capacities of enjoyment than the brute beasts that perish, then there is enough for us, and more than enough, in this well stored world. But admit that “there is a spirit in man,” view him as a being endowed with mind and affections, with a feeling heart and a thinking soul, there is not one of our race, however degraded, whom the whole earth could satisfy, nor a longing for happiness in any one breast, that the whole material universe could fill.

The man born from above knows this well; but I appeal not to him; no, nor to that wretched groveller in the dust, whom the disappointments of life have soured and chilled. I ask the happiest of you all, the young, and light-hearted, and prosperous, what is the world to you? It may be your all, but are you satisfied with your all? Has it not left wants within you? great and painful wants, which you cannot quiet? Conscience tells you it has. You could hardly define them, you never talk of them, you try to bury them deep in the secrecy of your own breasts, to lose the sense of them in the excitements of pleasure or the hurry of business, but you feel them still; there are moments when you hardly know how to bear them, when you are conscious of such thirstings within and such dissatisfaction with every thing without you, that the world seems a desert, and you starving in it and wretched. And this feeling of desolation all springs from one source—you are as sheep that are lost. You are at a distance from God, the fountain of happiness; and the blessedness that flows from his presence, is consequently at a distance from you.

2. And think of *the danger* of such a state.

A sheep in eastern countries, when away from the shepherd, is never safe. No animal is beset with more enemies, or exposed to greater perils. And to what are we exposed? To foes so numerous and dangers so manifold, that the mind is bewildered as it contemplates them. A soul delivered from them is one of the greatest wonders in the creation of God. It is one of the most splendid manifestations, we might almost say, one of the mightiest efforts, of his omnipotence. As such St. Peter regarded it. He says of the redeemed, that they are “kept,” and how? By God? by his grace and love? No; they are “kept by the power of God unto salvation.”

And to aggravate the dangers encompassing us, we are naturally fearless of them; unconscious perhaps of their existence; nay, we meet, we court them. A sheep straying where the lions roam or the tiger lurks, is a representation that does not come up to the fact. Behold that sheep running to sport by the tiger’s side, going for rest in its weariness into the lion’s hiding place; and there is a more exact emblem of man’s danger and man’s recklessness.

3. And we must add to these features of our condition yet one more—*helplessness*.

The sheep has neither strength to overcome, courage to resist, nor swiftness to elude, its enemies. Its preservation depends entirely on the shepherd’s

arm and the fold's security. And herein again it represents us and our state with fearful precision. Not that in this helplessness, considered in itself, there is any thing fearful. We share it in common with the whole creation. Sin has not entailed it on us. The highest archangel that does the bidding of Jehovah in heaven, or the purest spirit that worships him there, has no more strength in himself than the most lost of lost men. He is no more able to satisfy his own soul, than to create a world. And place even us in heaven, place us any where by the side of our God, we may rejoice in our weakness. It binds us to the Holy One; it is a claim on his pity and care, which he never disowns. But when separated from God, this weakness of our nature becomes an appalling evil. There is ruin in it. "Every one that findeth me," said the wretched Cain, "shall slay me;" and we may say the same of all the perils that beset us. Left to ourselves, we have neither the power nor the will to escape them. Assault is the same as defeat; temptation is another word for sin, and danger another name for destruction.

This is our condition, brethren, and in all the need, peril, and weakness of it, every redeemed spirit was once involved. The parable places him in the midst of its wretchedness, and then goes on to tell us how he was extricated.

## II. It bids us notice *the conduct of Christ towards him.*

1. The first circumstance that strikes us in this, is the Redeemer's care and concern for the lost sinner. He is aware of his loss; *he misses him.*

Amongst a hundred sheep, it might have been conceived that the absence of one would probably escape observation; and even if observed, would occasion very little concern; but the parable takes the reverse of this for granted. It supposes that every one of the flock is under the shepherd's eye; that when it strays, its wandering is noticed and its loss felt. And the same Bible that describes the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Shepherd of his church, describes him as a Being whose care is not only extensive, reaching to all the worlds that crowd his universe, but particular and close; fastened as much on every creature his hands have formed, as though he had formed none other, as though that one creature were the only object of his care. And when we add to this another truth, that he has a special love for this fallen world as the chosen theatre of his manifestation, and sojourning, and glory; and a more peculiar love still for those in it whom he has bought with his blood; we need not wonder that neither the glories of heaven nor the confusion of earth, can conceal the wandering of one poor sinner from his eye. Besides, his sheep are his charge; he received them as a sacred trust from Jehovah to be returned to him again; and as a faithful Servant, he must watch over this charge; the flock which his Father has given him, must be complete. Hence he speaks of himself as exercising a care far beyond that of any earthly guardian; as knowing not only the number of his people, but their persons, and characters, and circumstances; and deriving a part of his excellence and glory from this

knowledge. "I am the good Shepherd," he says, "and know my sheep." "He telleth the number of the stars," says the psalmist; "he calleth them all by their names;" but he says of himself, "He calleth his own sheep by name." And if this be not enough, he turns again to his redeemed, and says to them plainly, without exaggeration or metaphor, "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

2. A care thus extraordinary in its nature, may naturally be expected to lead to action, and action as extraordinary as itself. And it does so. The Lord Jesus Christ *seeks the lost sinner*.

The shepherd in the parable is supposed to leave the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness; that is, safe amidst the cultivated grounds or enclosed pastures of the wilderness; and to "go after that which is lost." And why does he go after it? Because "that which is lost," can be recovered by no other means. The wandering sheep never returns. Not like the dog or the bird that will find its way back from almost any distance, it cannot retrace its steps. Once a wanderer, it wanders on for ever. And when did an erring sinner ever return to his forsaken God? Of his own accord, never; and were the world to stand ten thousand years, and were the same question to be asked at the end of those years, the same answer would still be given—never. The thing is impossible. Sin has rendered it impossible. It alienates man from God. It throws up a barrier between them in man's own heart. It deprives him of the very desire to return. Show him the bridge that Christ has thrown over the gulph which separates earth from heaven, he will not so much as set a foot on it; he would rather starve and sink where he is.

But O the unsearchable grace of Jehovah! he goes after the creature that will not enquire after him. He comes down out of heaven, from the most glorious place in the creation to one of the dreariest, and this, he tells us, is his errand, "to seek and to save that which was lost." And when arrived on the earth, no part of it did he leave unsearched, that he might find his own. He goes to Samaria, to seek a lost woman there; to Bethany, to seek Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus; to guilty Sidon, to seek the woman of Canaan; to accursed Jericho, to seek Zaccheus. He goes to the receipt of custom, that he may find the publican Matthew; to the sea-side, that he may call to himself Peter, and James, and John. And while hanging on the cross, in the very agonies of death, his work of searching is not suspended. He turns round to the malefactors beside him, and sees in one of them a sheep of his fold, a companion for paradise. And the same work is going on now. By his word, and his ministers, and his providence, and his Spirit, he is at this day and at this moment seeking us; and were we on the very verge of destruction, nay, were there but a step between us and all that is fearful, he would follow us on; he would seek us still; he would still desire and labour to pluck us as "brands from the burning." Hear his own language by his prophet Ezekiel; "Thus

saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. 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 will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.”

3. And this promise carries us on to another part of the Lord’s merciful conduct towards the sinner—*he finds him*.

He misses “that which is lost”—there is his care, his watchfulness he goes after it—there is his anxiety, his diligence; he finds it—there, his perseverance, his success.

And what are we to understand by his finding it? Nothing more than his making sermons, and afflictions, and mercies, effectual; causing them by his Spirit to do their appointed work; overtaking the sinner by them in his way to ruin, stopping and turning him. Were the Saviour this moment to find you, he would not at once take you away from all the evils of your condition, but he would open your eyes to discover them, and your hearts to care about them. He would make you as careless about the world and its concerns, as though you were on the point of leaving it; as full of anxiety about eternity, as though you saw its heaven and its hell lying open before you, and yourselves about to go into the one or the other. The sermon you are listening to, would be heard as never sermon was heard by you yet, and you would go from this house of God, and make your own chambers, perhaps for the first time since those chambers were built, places of prayer. And not this only, you would feel yourselves lost; you would see the wants, and dangers, and helplessness, of your condition; and with a feeling which you never before experienced, you would cry aloud, “What must I do to be saved?” And then you would cast yourselves on Christ; and that would be the happiest moment of your life. Then indeed would you “be found of him.” His hand would be on you, and his Spirit within you. A connection would begin between him and your soul, so close, that henceforth he would deem you one with himself; so sweet, that you would cheerfully give up all the world rather than have it severed; so lasting, that when all earthly ties are snapped asunder, this would be strong as ever. You would be enabled to stand on the ruin of all that is dear to you, on the wreck of a perished world, and ask with the exulting Paul, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? I am persuaded that neither death nor life; nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”

4. The consequence of this union with Christ would be a blessed experience of another act of his goodness, the consummation of his mercy towards the recovered sinner—*he bears him home*. “And when he hath found it,” says

the text, “he layeth it on his shoulders.” We know why the shepherd places it there. The sheep, worn out by its wanderings and hardships, may be unable to follow him; or it may be unwilling to return to the fold, or averse to the road that leads to it; or dangers may be thick around; the beasts of the wood may be lying in wait, and, even in the shepherd’s presence, seeking to destroy. He accordingly places it on his shoulders, and thus ensures at once its safety, its comfort, and its arrival at home.

We need no apostle or prophet to explain to us a figure like this. It tells us of the distance still stretching itself out between us and heaven; of the mountains to be climbed and the wastes to be traversed; of the ten thousand labours and dangers beset the road, and of our utter inability to avoid or surmount one of them. It shows us the miserable sheep exhausted and sinking down in the desert far away from its rest; hungering for the green pastures of the fold, but unable to take a step in the way to them; and there, it says, is an image of ourselves. And then it tells us of the power we have so often felt raising up and sustaining us; of the arm we have rested on, and never yet found it fail us; of the ease, and security, and blessedness, with which we are passing through temptations and conflicts, and drawing near, almost without being aware of it, to a heavenly land.

It is cheering to think of the blessed Jesus as the companion of our pilgrimage; it imparts an unutterable delight to the soul, to feel that we are going up from the wilderness leaning on our Beloved; but this thought and this feeling come far short of the truth. We are not by his side; he tells us that we are on his shoulders, in his bosom, in his arms. “Ye have seen,” he says to his redeemed, “how I bare you on eagles’ wings,” carried you with more than a shepherd’s care, with a father’s solicitude and a mother’s tenderness, “and brought you” through clouds, and storms, and darkness, “unto myself.” I bare you “as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came unto this place.”

And observe, brethren, the peculiar force of this language. While it assures you of your safety, it represents that safety as depending every moment solely on the Lord Jesus. You can never perish, not because you have been “found of Christ,” not because he has bought you, and gone after you, and made you his own; but because you are on his shoulder, borne along by him, upheld by his power. You are safe, but your safety rests not in yourselves; it springs not from any thing that has been wrought within you or done without you; it lies simply in this one thing—your being in the constant care and keeping of your omnipotent Lord.

And this is the view given us in this text of the conduct of Christ towards the people he loves—he misses them when lost, he seeks them, he finds them, he bears them home. What a wonderful expenditure of mercy on creatures so vile! We throw away that which is worthless, for we have no power to alter

its nature or to give it value; but the things that are worthless or seem so, are the very things that God gathers up. “The weak things of the world, and base things of the world, and things that are despised, hath he chosen,” and chosen them for this very purpose, that he may glorify himself by making them the most precious and splendid of the treasures of heaven.

III. We have yet one point more to consider—*the feeling with which the great Shepherd of the church carries on this blessed work.*

And this feeling is as wonderful as the work itself. It is not pity, it is not compassion or kindness, no, nor yet love; it is joy, and joy overflowing; a joy so great that the divine mind cannot hold it; the whole creation is called on to come and share its abundance. “He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

We are ready perhaps to take this as a mere figure of speech, as little or nothing more than an eastern ornament, meaning something perhaps, but much less than is expressed. And even if we give this language what we consider its full force, even if we admit that the Lord Christ actually experiences some joy in saving his church, we are tempted to think that it is only as man that he feels it. But the testimony of scripture on this point is plain and decisive. It declares that in the divine mind itself, even in God considered as God, there is joy in the conversion and salvation of a transgressor’s soul. Look at the parables following one another in this chapter. The main scope of them all is to imply, if not to express, this very thing. Look at the explicit declarations of the Holy Ghost. “God,” says the prophet Micah, “delighteth in mercy,” in pardoning, redeeming mercy; it is congenial to his nature; gratifying, delightful to his mind. “Behold,” says Isaiah in the name of Jehovah, or rather Jehovah himself by his servant’s lips, “Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy; and I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people.” And hear Zephaniah, another prophet; “The Lord thy God, in the midst of thee, is mighty. He will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing.” Now these and similar expressions can mean but one thing, and that the same thing which this text implies, and the verse following the text clearly asserts—“there is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth,” joy among the angels, joy in the human soul of the exalted Jesus, and joy higher still in the infinite mind of the infinite God. There is joy in seeking his people, joy in finding his people, joy in upholding and preserving his people, and joy yet more abundant in bringing them home; a joy of which the great Jehovah is not ashamed; he publishes it amongst his angels, it is seen among the shining glories that surround him, it diffuses itself through the immense world he inhabits, it augments and sweetens those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore.



And now, brethren, let our thoughts come home to ourselves. The things we have heard concern ourselves. They concern us as closely and deeply, as though there were no other people whom they concern at all. The situation referred to in this parable, either is or has been our own. We have a thousand times acknowledged it to be ours, and we have made this acknowledgment under such circumstances, that if we have been insincere in it, we have “not lied unto men, but unto God.” “All we like sheep have gone astray,” was the confession of the church of old, a confession made to its fellow-men. We have said the same to the living God. We have said on our knees, and said it as though we were anxious for our words to be heard in heaven, “Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.” Now if there are any amongst us who have really meant what this language imports, any who feel themselves to be as sheep that are lost, in a starving, dangerous, and perishing condition; and who, at the same time, deplore this condition, and long above all things for deliverance from it; then this scripture exactly meets their case. It admits the truth of all you can say concerning your misery and helplessness; it takes you on your own ground; and standing there, it proclaims to you relief. It shows you One moving about that world of desolation into which you have wandered, and taking out one after another from it, and bringing him to his home. It tells you that this Deliverer is able to save those who are utterly unable to save themselves; that he delights, rejoices in saving them. And you are told this to let you see how able and willing he is to save you. The parable before us was never uttered to silence a company of murmuring pharisees; it has not been preserved through so many ages merely to grace the book that contains it; it has not been sounded this day in your ears to excite your admiration or wonder: its purpose is this—to reach your hearts; to send you to your closets and your knees, determined by God’s help to be no longer as sheep that are lost, but rather to cast yourselves on your Redeemer’s mercy, to confide in his grace, to prove his compassion, to add to his joy.

Are you ignorant of your spiritual condition? or knowing it, careless about it? anxious, half wearied out in providing for the body, but reckless about the immortal soul? Then let this scripture produce at least one effect on you—let it cause you to wonder. The gracious conduct it describes is not a mere fiction. Something like what it represents is actually going on, and going on every hour. The blessed Jesus is anxious for the sinner that is lost, he is seeking and bearing home many a ransomed spirit, and is doing this with unutterable joy. He deems even the lost soul precious; it is never for one moment out of his thoughts: and yet though this lost soul is your own, you care no more about it than about the dust in your path. How can this strange thing be? Well may I ask, How can the rescuing of such a soul as mine delight an infinite God? but much greater reason have I to ask, How is it possible

that its wretched and forlorn state does not distress me? There must be something radically amiss within me, something that perverts my judgment and hardens my heart. This ease, in a situation like mine, cannot be prudent; this unconcern cannot be rational; this recklessness cannot be safe. What then is the root of this mischief? It is self-evident—I have a diseased nature. Madness is in my heart. I must be renewed in the spirit of my mind. I must be made a new creature. I must be born again.

And what says this scripture to you who are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls? you whom Christ has sought, and found, and is carrying home? It bids you look back to the years that are gone. It asks you what you were in those years, and in what situation. You were lost, and almost content to be lost; amidst wants, and dangers, and wretchedness, which you had no strength to escape nor eyes to discover. And where are you now? On your Saviour's shoulder. And why are you there? Because if left to yourselves, you would be lost again. "By grace are ye saved," says this scripture to you, by grace alone. It bids you be humble, more humble than you have ever been yet. And then it tells you to look forward. How glorious the prospect that it opens! For creatures such as we are to enter heaven at all, is a wonder of mercy, a manifestation of goodness almost surpassing belief. Who that has ever caught a glimpse of that high world, does not say at times, "My polluted soul can never enter it?" But to be brought there by Jehovah himself; to hear that holy world called on to exult in our arrival, and to find that call obeyed; to discover that the God whose love and even whose pity towards us we have so long suspected, is admitting us to the glory of his presence, and receiving us there, not with the cold commiseration we often ascribe to him, but with a joy so overflowing, so real and great, that his own infinite mind can hardly contain it;—is it not marvellous, brethren, that a prospect like this is ever for one moment out of our thoughts? A feeling of self-abasement, a thrilling sense of our own nothingness, is the first and, it may be, the strongest emotion that ought to abide with us; but if we are not happy and thankful, where shall thankfulness and joy be found? In our Redeemer's arms, borne along by him in the way to his heavenly fold, our arrival there as sure as his grace, and power, and covenant, can make it, with scarcely a step between us and its blessedness;—we may weep and tremble, but then are our souls in the holiest as well as the happiest state, when we rejoice as we tremble; when our songs are more numerous than our tears; when praise is at once our work and our delight.