

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Who's Your One Series

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

Matthew 18:1-14

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INTRODUCTION: We are continuing our emphasis on the theme of “Who’s Your One”, which is our campaign to reach people for the Lord. The idea is that there is one person out there, one person in your life or who should be in your life, that you should be praying for and nurturing with the intent of sharing the Lord and inviting to church.

The first message in this campaign was on Zacchaeus, the second was about the woman at the well. Today, I will share the parable of the lost sheep.

There are two points to my message today:

- The lost sheep represents one.
- The lost sheep represents each of us.

Let me give you some historical background to today’s story: Jesus had been training his disciples for quite some time. By now, they were gaining a greater understanding of the Kingdom of God through Jesus, but they did not fully understand all that was going on.

The disciples still struggled with a basic understanding of the order of things. They had a sense of competition in their minds that some of them were more important than others, and they asked Jesus about it.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:1-10

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Jesus knew how to bring them down to reality, and he answered in verse 2:

² He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³ And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

⁶ “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Now, Jesus goes into the seriousness of things that cause people to stumble:

⁷ Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. ¹⁰ “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

That’s our background to today’s message. Hopefully, you can visualize it. The disciples who wanted to know who would be greatest in God’s kingdom probably were sorry they asked the question. They probably just expected a simple answer from Jesus that went something like this: “All of you, my disciples, will be the greatest,” or maybe a couple of them wanted guaranteed status, but instead he shocked them by bringing up children, who were generally an after-thought in that world. Children were seen, not heard, in those days.

Now that Jesus had their attention and he had humbled them and brought them down to reality, he talked about the importance of one.

1-THE LOST SHEEP REPRESENTS ONE

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:12-14

“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one

sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

ILLUSTRATION: I know nothing about shepherding and unless we have some shepherds here, I doubt any of you know much more about it than me. All we know, really, is what we read and hear about it. Almost all of my limited knowledge of shepherding comes from the Bible:

- David was a shepherd.
- Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd”.
- Psalm 100: “We are the sheep of his pasture”.
- John 10 says he is the Good Shepherd.

ILLUSTRATION: I had a positive image of sheep until I was older and someone said, “You know why the Scriptures refer to us as sheep.” I said, “No.” This man said, “Because they’re not real smart. They don’t have good eyesight, and they are helpless without a shepherd.”

EXPLANATION: Here, Jesus mentions a lost sheep. Sheep travel, live, and graze in flocks, yet one gets away. Why does the sheep get away? Perhaps it was distracted by greener pastures, maybe the flock was rather spread out one day and the sheep slowly wandered away without realizing it, or maybe the sheep wasn’t feeling well and was left behind.

In the parable, Jesus did not focus on what the sheep did to be lost. Instead, he focuses on what the shepherd did.

The shepherd did what does not make sense in economic terms. The shepherd left ninety-nine sheep alone and searched for that one.

A shepherd is a hired hand whose job is to ensure the safety of the flock, so that the owner of the flock can make money by selling wool and meat. The shepherd has to fight off bears and wolves and other predators. The shepherd lays down his life for his flock. The shepherd does everything for the sheep.

It makes no sense for a shepherd to leave ninety-nine sheep behind with no protection to go search for one lost sheep who’s probably been overtaken by predators anyway. Besides, a new sheep is likely to be born at any time and that would make up the difference.

But no, this shepherd did what does not make good business or economic sense. In business, there's an old term: cut your losses and move on. It would have been better and safer for the ninety-nine sheep if the shepherd had just cut his loss of the one sheep and stayed with the larger flock.

ILLUSTRATION: Not only did the shepherd do what does not make sense in economic terms, the shepherd also risked his job. A manager, a foreman, a CEO, even the lowly shepherd – all of them are in charge of the bottom line: ensuring income for their company. Leaders have to make decisions every day along this line. They cannot focus the small stuff all the time or their companies will fail. And a smart leader wants to stay employed. A smart leader wants the organization to succeed. If a leader does not know how to focus on the bigger product, the bigger picture, or how to focus his or her time on ways to improve production, then that leader will fail.

But no successful leader made it to their position without a resume of risks taken in the past. Some of those risks were probably successful, some were not. Nevertheless, the leader is confronted at times with what to do. Do we stop production in order to deal with this problem so that we'll have a better product for our customers later?

ILLUSTRATION: Early in the car industry, Henry Ford did that. The Ford company ceased production while Henry Ford was busy dreaming up the station wagon. How many of you have ever ridden in a station wagon? His risk paid off.

EXPLANATION: The shepherd never thought about Henry Ford. The shepherd never thought about leadership principles. The shepherd simply took a calculated risk. He believed the flock was safe at the moment. He decided to search for the lost sheep. He could have been wrong. Perhaps thieves knew he would go look for one, therefore they could steal the flock. Despite all that could have gone wrong, the shepherd left the flock behind. He believed the flock was safe and that there was strength in numbers. He searched for the lost sheep until he found it. When he returned to his flock, they were all there.

A LITTLE ASIDE HERE to point out something: Your church staff is a lot like shepherds. We reach out to individuals and sometimes it's time-consuming. We get involved in helping people find their way, and in order to do that, we have to leave the flock behind. It's not our desire to neglect the flock. It's our desire to bring someone into the flock or to bring someone back to the flock. The difference

between a flock of sheep and a flock people is that people talk.

It's easy for people to say, *“Hey, they're neglecting us. Look at us. We are the ones paying the bills.”* And our response is, kindly: *“Yes, and you had a warm bed to sleep in last night. You had food to eat. You already know Jesus as Savior. You have plenty of Christian friends around you. You are safe in the flock. Now please pardon us while we look for the ones who are lost.”*

EXPLANATION: In the account of this parable in Luke, Jesus didn't stop with the parable of the lost sheep. He also told the parable of the lost coin. Then he told the parable of the lost son, or as we know it, “the prodigal son.” Jesus uses parables to get his point across. That “one” matters.

There are common themes in these parables: Something is lost, then something is found, then there is rejoicing.

Not only does the lost sheep represent “one” but...

2-THE LOST SHEEP REPRESENTS EACH OF US

Without a shepherd, we are all lost. We are the one wandering away. We are the one that needs to be found.

ILLUSTRATION: My son and I saw the “Jesus Revolution” movie. There are several story lines in the movie and one of them is of Greg Laurie, a pastor in California who was a lost, wandering young soul in the 1960s. His mother and father split up when he was a boy, and he later found out that the man he thought was his father was not. He got caught up in the drug culture of the 1960s. He was lost. And then Jesus, the Good Shepherd, reached out to him.

EXPLANATION: We might say we found Jesus, but the reality is that Jesus found us. We can never get to him on our own. Because he first loved us, as the scripture says, God has made a way for us to come to Him through Jesus. And like the shepherd in the parable, Jesus does not spend time analyzing why we strayed. He doesn't point his finger and accuse us. He goes out to seek and to save the person who is lost. He does not hold our past against us.

Isaiah 53:6 says, *“We all like sheep have gone astray, each one has turned to his own way.”* Rationally, you may think, “I am a good person. I am not wandering.

I'm not trashed out on drugs." But the reality is without Jesus, none of us are in any better shape than the worst of sinners.

I Peter 2:25: *For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

Jesus pursues us. He searches for us in our lost state.

Luke 19:10 tell us that *the son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost.*

APPLICATION: All of you who are saved today have a testimony that Jesus found you in your lost state and saved you from your sins and gave you the hope of eternal life.

- If you are here today, or are listening or watching by other means, the mere fact that you are hearing this message this morning is the Lord's searching for you, because by his grace you are hearing these words.

Jesus the Good Shepherd is searching for the one that is lost, just like the shepherd in the parable told to a group of listeners so long ago.

Let's look back at Matthew 18, verse 13, regarding the lost sheep: *And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.*

Does this mean the shepherd no longer cares for those who did not wander off? No! When there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner comes to repentance, does it mean that all of heaven no longer cares for those who've already repented? No!

In verse 13, Jesus was merely circling back around to answer the disciples' question about who was most important in God's kingdom. Here is the answer: All are important. One matters.

- You may think of yourself as less important than a great Christian you know, but you are not.
- You may think of yourself as less important than that Christian who seems to have it all together, but you are not.
- You may think of yourself as less important than some missionary, or famous preacher, but you are not.

Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. He rejoices when only one has been found. With Jesus, you do not get lost in the crowd. He knows your name. He knows all about you. He is seeking you out today.

Repentance is the key. Maybe you've been that wandering sheep. You are Jesus' one. He specializes in one.

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