

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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‘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. 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’ [Luke 15:4-7](#).

OUR Lord Jesus Christ while he was here below was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. He took pains to put himself where he could come into communication with them, and he exhibited such kindness toward them that in crowds they drew near to hear him. I dare say it was a queer-looking assembly, a disreputable rabble, which made the Lord Jesus its centre. I am not astonished that the Pharisee, when he looked upon the congregation, sneered and said, ‘He collects around him the pariahs of our community, the wretches who collect taxes for the foreigner of God’s free people; the fallen women of the town, and such-like riffraff make up his audiences; he, instead of repelling them, receives them, welcomes them, looks upon them as a class to whom he has a peculiar relationship. He even eats with them. Did he not go into the house of Zaccheus, and the house of Levi, and partake of the feasts which these low people made for him?’ We cannot tell you all the Pharisees thought, it might not be edifying to attempt it; but they thought as badly of the Lord as they possibly could, because of the company which surrounded him. And so, he deigns in this parable to defend himself; not that he cared much about what they might think, but that they might have no excuse for speaking so bitterly of him. He tells them that he was seeking the lost, and where should he be found but among those whom he is seeking? Should a physician shun the sick? Should a shepherd avoid the lost sheep? Was he not exactly in his right position when there ‘drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him’?

Our divine Lord defended himself by what is called an *argumentum ad hominem*, an argument to the men themselves; for he said, ‘What man *of you*, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not go after that which is lost, until he find it?’ No argument tells more powerfully upon men than one which comes close home to their own daily life,

and the Saviour put it so. They were silenced, if they were not convinced. It was a peculiarly strong argument, because in their case it was only a sheep that they would go after, but in his case it was something infinitely more precious than all the flocks of sheep that ever fed on Sharon or Carmel; for it was the soul of man which he sought to save. The argument had in it not only the point of peculiar adaptation, but a force at the back of it unusually powerful for driving it home upon every honest mind. It may be opened out in this fashion, 'If you men would each one of you go after a lost sheep, and follow in its track until you found it, how much more may I go after lost souls, and follow them in all their wanderings until I can rescue them?' The going after the sheep is a part of the parable which our Lord meant them to observe: the shepherd pursues a route which he would never think of pursuing if it were only for his own pleasure; his way is not selected for his own ends, but for the sake of the stray sheep. He takes a track up hill and down dale, far into a desert, or into some dark wood, simply because the sheep has gone that way, and he must follow it until he finds it. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a matter of taste and pleasure, would never have been found among the publicans and sinners, nor among any of our guilty race: if he had consulted his own ease and comfort he would have consorted only with pure and holy angels, and the great Father above; but he was not thinking of himself, his heart was set upon the lost ones, and therefore he went where the lost sheep were; 'for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' The more steadily you look at this parable the more clearly you will see that our Lord's answer was complete. We need not this morning regard it exclusively as an answer to Pharisees, but we may look at it as an instruction to ourselves; for it is quite as complete in that direction. May the good Spirit instruct us as we muse upon it.

I. In the first place, I call attention to this observation: THE ONE SUBJECT OF THOUGHT to the man who had lost his sheep. This sets forth to us the one thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, when he sees a man lost to holiness and happiness by wandering into sin.

The shepherd, on looking over his little flock of one hundred, can only count ninety-nine. He counts them again, and he notices that a certain one has gone: it may be a white-faced sheep with a black mark on its foot: he knows all about it, for 'the Lord knoweth them that are his.' The shepherd has a photograph of the wanderer in his mind's eye, and now he thinks but little of the ninety and nine who are feeding in the pastures of the wilderness, but his mind is in a ferment about the one lost sheep. This one idea possesses him: 'a sheep is lost!' This agitates his mind more and more 'a sheep is lost.' It masters his every faculty. He cannot eat bread; he cannot return to his home; he cannot rest while one sheep is lost.

To a tender heart a lost sheep is a painful subject of thought. It is a sheep, and therefore utterly *defenseless* now that it has left its defender. If the wolf should spy it out, or the lion or the bear should come across its track, it would be torn in pieces in an instant. Thus the shepherd asks his heart the question 'What will become of my sheep? Perhaps at this very

moment a lion may be ready to spring upon it, and, if so, it cannot help itself.' A sheep is not prepared for fight, and even for flight it has not the swiftness of its enemy. That makes its compassionate owner the more sad as he thinks again 'A sheep is lost, it is in great danger of a cruel death.' A sheep is of all creatures the most *senseless*. If we have lost a dog, it may find its way home again; possibly a horse might return to its master's stable; but a sheep will wander on and on, in endless mazes lost. It is too foolish a thing to think of returning to the place of safety. A lost sheep is lost indeed in countries where lands lie unenclosed and the plains are boundless. That fact still seems to ring in the man's soul 'A sheep is lost, and it will not return, for it is a foolish thing. Where may it not have gone by this time? Weary and worn, it may be fainting; it may be far away from green pastures, and be ready to perish with hunger among the bare rocks or upon the arid sand.' A sheep is *shiftless*; it knows nothing about providing for itself. The camel can scent water from afar, and a vulture can espy its food from an enormous distance; but the sheep can find nothing for itself. Of all wretched creatures a lost sheep is one of the worst. If anybody had stepped up to the shepherd just then, and said, 'Good sir, what aileth you? you seem in great concern;' he would have replied, 'And well I may be, for a sheep is lost.' 'It is only one, sir; and I see you have ninety-nine left.' 'Do you call it nothing to lose one? You are no shepherd yourself, or you would not trifle so. Why, I seem to forget these ninety-nine that are all safe, and my mind only remembers that one which is lost.'

What is it which makes the Great Shepherd lay so much to his heart the loss of one of his flock? What is it that makes him agitated as he reflects upon that supposition 'if he lose one of them'?

I think it is, first, because of *his property in it*. The parable does not so much speak of a hired shepherd, but of a shepherd proprietor. 'What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them.' Jesus, in another place, speaks of the hireling, whose own the sheep are not, and therefore he flees when the wolf comes. It is the shepherd proprietor who lays down his life for the sheep. It is not a sheep alone, and a lost sheep, but it is one of his own lost sheep that this man cares for. This parable is not written about lost humanity in the bulk 'it may be so used if you please' but in its first sense it is written about Christ's own sheep; as also is the second parable concerning the woman's own money; and the third, not concerning any prodigal youth, but the father's own son. Jesus has his own sheep, and some of them are lost; yea, they were all once in the same condition; for 'all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.' The parable refers to the unconverted, whom Jesus has redeemed with his most precious blood, and whom he has undertaken to seek and to save: these are those other sheep whom also he must bring in. 'For 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.' The sheep of Christ are his long before they know it his even when they wander; when they are brought into the fold by the effectual working of his grace they become manifestly what they were in covenant from of old. The sheep are Christ's, first, because he chose them from before the foundations of the world 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.' His, next, because the Father gave them to him. How he dwells upon that fact in his great prayer in [John 17](#): 'Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;' 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.' We are the Lord's own flock, furthermore, by his purchase of us; he says: 'I lay down my life for the sheep.' It is nearly nineteen centuries ago since he paid the ransom price, and bought us to be his own; and we shall be his, for that purchase-money was not paid in vain. And so the Saviour looks upon his hands, and sees the marks of his purchase; he looks upon his side, and sees the token of the effectual redemption of his own elect unto himself by the pouring out of his own heart's blood before the living God. This thought, therefore, presses upon him, 'One of my sheep is lost.' It is a wonderful supposition, that is contained in this parable if he lose one of them.' What! lose one whom he loved before ever the earth was? It may wander for a time, but he will not have it lost for ever, that he cannot bear. What! lose one whom his Father gave him to be his own? Lose one whom he has bought with his own life? He will not endure the thought. That word 'if he lose one of them' sets his soul on fire. It shall not be. You know how much the Lord has valued each one of his chosen, laying down his life for his redemption. You know how dearly he loves every one of his people: it is no new passion with him, neither can it grow old. He has loved his own and must love them to the end. From eternity that love has endured already, and it must continue throughout the ages, for he changeth not. Will he lose one of those so dearly loved? Never; never. He has eternal possession of them by a covenant of salt, wherein the Father has given them to him: this it is that in great measure stirs his soul so that he thinks of nothing but this fact, 'One of my sheep is lost.

Secondly, he has yet another reason for this all-absorbing thought, namely, *his great compassion* for his lost sheep. The wandering of a soul causes Jesus deep sorrow; he cannot bear the thought of its perishing. Such is the love and tenderness of his heart that he cannot bear that one of his own should be in jeopardy. He can take no rest as long as a soul for whom he shed his blood still abides under the dominion of Satan and under the power of sin; therefore the Great Shepherd neither night nor day forgets his sheep: he must save his flock, and he is straitened til it be accomplished.

He has a deep sympathy with each stray heart. He knows the sorrow that sin brings, the deep pollution and the terrible wounding that comes of transgression, even at the time; and the sore heart and the broken spirit that will come of it before long; so the sympathetic Saviour grieves over each lost sheep, for he knows the misery which lies in the fact of being lost. If you have ever been in a house with a mother and father, and daughters and sons,

when a little child has been lost, you will never forget the agitation of each member of the household. See the father as he goes to the police-station, and calls at every likely house; for he must find his child or break his heart. See the deep oppression and bitter anguish of the mother; she is like one distracted until she has news of her darling. You now begin to understand what Jesus feels for one whom he loves, who is graven on the palms of his hands, whom he looked upon in the glass of his foreknowledge, when he was bleeding his life away upon the tree; he hath no rest in his spirit til his beloved is found. He has compassion like a God, and that doth transcend all the compassion of parents or of brothers,'the compassion of an infinite heart brimming over with an ocean of love. This one thought moves the pity of the Lord'if he lose one of them.'

Moreover, the man in the parable had a third relation to the sheep, which made him possessed with the one thought of its being lost,'*he was a shepherd to it*. It was his own sheep, and he had therefore for that very reason become its shepherd; and he says to himself, 'If I lose one of them my shepherd-work will be ill-done.' What dishonour it would be to a shepherd to lose one of his sheep! Either it must be for want of power to keep it, or want of will, or want of watchfulness; but none of these can appertain to the Chief Shepherd. Our Lord Jesus Christ will never have it said of him that he has lost one of his people, for he glories in having preserved them all. 'While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.' The devil shall never say that Jesus suffered one whom his Father gave him to perish. His work of love cannot in any degree become a failure. His death in vain! No, not in jot or tittle. I can imagine, if it were possible, that the Son of God should live in vain; but to die in vain! It shall never be. The purpose that he meant to achieve by his passion and death he shall achieve, for he is the Eternal, the Infinite, the Omnipotent; and who shall stay his hand, or baffle his design? He will not have it. 'If he lose one of them,' says the passage; imagine the consequence. What scorn would come from Satan! What derision would he pour upon the Shepherd! How hell would ring with the news, 'He hath lost one of them.' Suppose it to be the feeblest; then would they cry, 'He could keep the strong, who could keep themselves.' Suppose it to be the strongest; then would they cry, 'He could not even keep one of the mightiest of them, but must needs let him perish.' This is good argument, for Moses pleaded with God, 'What will the Egyptians say?' It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones shall perish, neither is it for the glory of Christ that one of his own sheep should be eternally lost.

You see the reason for the Lord's heart being filled with one burning thought; for first, the sheep is his own; next, he is full of compassion; and then again, it is his office to shepherd the flock.

All this while the sheep is not thinking about the shepherd, or caring for him in the least degree. Some of you are not thinking at all about the Lord Jesus. You have no wish nor will

to seek after him! What folly! Oh, the pity of it, that the great heart above should be yearning over you to-day, and should fall to rest because you are in peril, and you, who will be the greater loser, for you will lose your own soul, are sporting with sin, and making yourself merry with destruction. Ah, me! how far you have wandered! How hopeless would your case be if there were not an Almighty Shepherd to think upon you.

II. Now we come to the second point, and observe THE ONE OBJECT OF SEARCH. This sheep lies on the shepherd's heart, and he must at once set out to look for it. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and goes after that which is lost until he find it.

Observe here that it is *a definite search*. The shepherd goes after the sheep, and after nothing else; and he has the one particular sheep in his mind's eye. I should have imagined, from the way in which I have seen this text handled, that Christ, the Shepherd, went down into the wilderness to catch anybody's sheep he could find. Many were running about, and he did not own any one of them more than another, but was content to pick up the one that he could first lay hold upon; or rather, that which first came running after him. Not so is the case depicted in the parable. It is his own sheep that he is seeking, and he goes distinctly after that one. It is his sheep which was lost, 'a well-known sheep; well known not only to himself, but even to his friends and neighbours,' for he speaks to them as if it was perfectly understood which sheep it was that he went to save. Jesus knows all about his redeemed, and he goes definitely after such and such a soul. When I am preaching in the name of the Lord, I delight to think that I am sent to individuals with the message of mercy. I am not going to draw the bow at a venture at all; but when the Divine hands are put on mine to draw the bow, the Lord takes such aim that no arrow misses its mark; into the very centre of the heart the word finds its way; for Jesus goes not forth at a peradventure in his dealings with men. He subdues the will and conquers the heart, making his people willing in the day of his power. He calls individuals and they come. He says, 'Mary,' and the response is, 'Rabboni.' I say, the man in the parable sought out a distinct individual, and rested not til he found it; so does the Lord Jesus in the movements of his love go forth at no uncertainty; he does not grope about to catch whom he may, as if he played at Blindman's-buff with salvation, but he seeks and saves the one out of his own sheep which he has his eye upon in its wanderings. Jesus knows what he means to do, and he will perform it to the glory of the Father.

Note that this is *an all-absorbing search*. He is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety-and-nine are left in safety; but they are left. When we read that he leaves them in the wilderness we are apt to think of some barren place; but that is not intended: it simply means the open pasturage, the steppe, the prairie: he leaves them well provided for, leaves them because he can leave them. For the time being he is carried away with the one thought that he must seek and save the lost one, and therefore he leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasture. 'Shepherd, the way is very rocky!' He does not seem to know what the way

is, his heart is with his lost sheep. 'Shepherd, it is a heavy climb up yon mountainside.' He does not note his toll; his excitement lends him the feet of the wild goat; he stands securely where at other times his foot would slip. He looks around for his sheep and seems to see neither crag nor chasm. 'Shepherd, it is a terrible path by which you must descend into yonder gloomy valley.' It is not terrible to him: his only terror is lest his sheep should perish; he is taken up with that one fear, and nothing else. He leaps into danger, and escapes it by the one strong impulse which bears him on. It is grand to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart set immovably upon the rescue of a soul which at this moment is lost to him.

It is *an active search too*; for observe, he goes after that which is lost, until he finds it; and he does this with *a personal search*. He does not say to one of his underlings, 'Here, hasten after that sheep which was lost, and bring it home.' No, *he* follows it himself. And if ever there is a soul brought from sin to grace, it is not by us poor ministers working alone, but it is by the Master himself, who goes after his own sheep. It is glorious to think of him still personally tracking sinners, who, though they fly from him with a desperateness of folly, yet are still pursued by him—pursued by the Son of God, by the Eternal Lover of men—pursued by him until he finds them.

For notice *the perseverance of the search*: 'until he find it.' He does not stop til he has done the deed. You and I ought to seek after a soul, how long? Why, until we find it; for such is the model set before us by the Master. The parable says nothing about his not finding it; no hint of failure is given; we dream not that there may be a sheep belonging to him which he will never find. Oh, brethren, there are a great many whom you and I would never find; but when Jesus is after his own lost sheep, depend upon it such is his skill, so clearly does he see, and so effectually does he intervene, that he will surely bring them in. A defeated Christ I cannot conceive of. It is a personal search, and a persevering search, and *a successful search*, until he finds it. Let us praise and bless his name for this.

Observe that when the shepherd does find it, there is a little touch in the parable not often noticed, 'he does not appear to put it back into the fold again: I mean, we do not find it so written, as a fact to be noted. I suppose he did so place it ultimately; but for the time being he keeps it with himself rather than with its fellows. The next scene is the shepherd at home, saying, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.' It looks as if Jesus did not save a soul so much to the church as to himself, and though the saved are in the flock, the greatest joy of all is that the sheep is with the shepherd. This shows you how thoroughly Christ lays himself out that he may save his people. There is nothing in Christ that does not tend toward the salvation of his redeemed. There are no pullbacks with him, no half-consecrated influences which make him linger. In the pursuit of certain objects we lay out a portion of our faculties; but Jesus lays out all his powers upon the seeking and saving of souls.

The whole Christ seeks after each sinner; and when the Lord finds it, he gives himself to that one soul as if he had but that one soul to bless. How my heart admires the concentration of all the Godhead and manhood of Christ in his search after each sheep of his flock.

III. Now, we must pass on very briefly to notice a third point. We have had one subject of thought and one object of search; now we have ONE BURDEN OF LOVE. When the seeking is ended, then the saving appears, 'When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.' Splendid action this! How beautifully the parable sets forth the whole of salvation. Some of the old writers delight to put it thus: in his incarnation he came after the lost sheep; in his life he continued to seek it; in his death he laid it upon his shoulders; in his resurrection he bore it on its way, and in his ascension he brought it home rejoicing. Our Lord's career is a course of soul-winning, a life laid out for his people; and in it you may trace the whole process of salvation.

But now, see, the shepherd finds the sheep, and he lays it on his shoulders. It is *an uplifting action*, raising the fallen one from the earth whereon he has strayed. It is as though he took the sheep just as it was, without a word of rebuke, without delay or hesitancy, and lifted it out of the slough or the briers into a place of safety. Do you not remember when the Lord lifted you up from the horrible pit? When he sent from above, and delivered you, and became your strength? I shall never forget that day. What a wonderful lift it was for me when the Great Shepherd lifted me into newness of life. The Lord said of Israel, 'I bare you on eagles' wings;' but it is a dearer emblem still to be born upon the shoulders of the incarnate Lord.

This laying on the shoulders was *an appropriating act*. He seemed to say, 'You are my sheep, and therefore I lay you on my shoulders.' He did not make his claim in so many words, but by a rapid action he declared it: for a man does not bear away a sheep to which he has no right: this was not a sheep-stealer, but a shepherd-proprietor. He holds fast the sheep by all four of its legs, so that it cannot stir, and then he lays it on his own shoulders, for it is all his own now. He seems to say, 'I am a long way from home, and I am in a weary desert; but I have found my sheep, and these hands shall hold it.' Here are our Lord's own words, 'I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.' Hands of such might as those of Jesus will hold fast the found one. Shoulders of such power as those of Jesus will safely bear the found one home. It is all well with that sheep, for it is positively and experimentally the Good Shepherd's own, just as it always had been his in the eternal purpose of the Father. Do you remember when Jesus said unto you, 'Thou art mine'? Then I know you also appropriated him, and began to sing'

'So I my best Beloved's am,
And he is mine.'

More condescending still is another view of this act: it was *a deed of service to the sheep*. The sheep is uppermost, the weight of the sheep is upon the shepherd. The sheep rides, the

shepherd is the burden-bearer. The sheep rests, the shepherd labours. 'I am among you as he that serveth,' said our Lord long ago. 'Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' On that cross he bore the burden of our sin, and what is more, the burden of our very selves. Blessed be his name, 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,' and he hath laid us on him, too, and he beareth us. Remember that choice Scripture: 'In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.' Soul-melting thought, the Son of God became subservient to the sons of man! The Maker of heaven and earth bowed his shoulders to bear the weight of sinners.

It was a *rest-giving act*, very likely *needful* to the sheep which could go no further, and was faint and weary. It was a full rest to the poor creature if it could have understood it, to feel itself upon its shepherd's shoulders, irresistibly carried back to safety. What a rest it is to you and to me to know that we are born along by the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ! 'The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.' The Christ upbears us to-day: we have no need of strength: our weakness is no impediment, for he bears us. Hath not the Lord said, 'I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you'? We shall not even stumble, much less fall to ruin: the shepherd's feet shall traverse all the road in safety. No portion of the way back should cause us fear, for he is able to bear us even to his home above. What a sweet word is that in Deuteronomy: 'The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.' Blessed rest of faith, to give yourself up entirely to those hands and shoulders to keep and carry you even to the end! Let us bless and praise the Lord. The shepherd is consecrated to his burden: he bears nothing on his shoulders but his sheep; and the Lord Jesus seemeth to bear no burden but that of his people. He lays out his omnipotence to save his chosen; having redeemed them first with price of blood, he redeems them still with all his power. 'And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels.' Oh the glorious grace of our unfailing Saviour, who consecrates himself to our salvation, and concentrates upon that object all that he has and is!

IV. We close by noticing one more matter, which is 'THE ONE SOURCE OF JOY. This man who had lost his sheep is filled with joy, but his sheep is the sole source of it. His sheep has so taken up all his thought, and so commanded all his faculties, that as he found all his care centred upon it, so he now finds all his joy flowing from it.

I invite you to notice the first mention of joy we get here: 'When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.' 'That is a great load for you, shepherd!' Joyfully he answers, 'I am glad to have it on my shoulders.' The mother does not say when she has found her lost child, 'This is a heavy load.' No; she presses it to her bosom. She does not mind how heavy it is; it is a dear burden to her. She is rejoiced to bear it once again. 'He layeth it on his shoulders, *rejoicing*.' Remember that text: 'Who for the joy that was set before

him endured the cross, despising the shame.’ A great sorrow was on Christ when our load was laid on him; but a greater joy flashed into his mind when he thought that we were thus recovered from our lost estate. He said to himself, ‘I have taken them up upon my shoulders, and none can hurt them now, neither can they wander to destruction. I am bearing their sin, and they shall never come into condemnation. The penalty of their guilt has been laid on me that it may never be laid on them. I am an effectual and efficient Substitute for them. I am bearing, that they may never bear, my Father’s righteous ire.’ His love to them made it a joy to feel every lash of the scourge of justice; his love to them made it a delight that the nails should pierce his hands and feet, and that his heart should be broken with the absence of his Father, God. Even ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,’ when the deeps of its woe have been sounded, will be found to have pearls of joy in its caverns. No shout of triumph can equal that cry of grief, because our Lord joyed to bear even the forsaking by his Father for the sin of his chosen whom he had loved from before the foundation of the world. Oh, you cannot understand it except in a very feeble measure! Let us try to find an earthly miniature likeness. A son is taken ill far away from home. He is laid sick with a fever, and a telegram is sent home. His mother says she *must* go and nurse him; she is wretched til she can set out upon the journey. It is a dreary place where her boy lies, but for the moment it is the dearest spot on earth to her. She joys to leave the comforts of her home to tarry among strangers for the love of her boy. She feels an intense joy in sacrificing herself; she refuses to retire from the bedside, she will not leave her charge; she watches day and night, and only from utter exhaustion does she fall asleep. You could not have kept her in England, she would have been too wretched. It was a great, deep, solemn pleasure for her to be where she could minister to her own beloved. Soul, remember you have given Jesus great joy in his saving you. He was for ever with the Father, eternally happy, infinitely glorious, as God over all; yet he must needs come hither out of boundless love, take upon himself our nature, and suffer in our stead to bring us back to holiness and God. ‘He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.’ That day the shepherd knew but one joy. He had found his sheep, and the very pressure of it upon his shoulders made his heart light, for he knew by that sign that the object of his care was safe beyond all question.

Now he goes home with it, and this joy of his was then so great that it filled his soul to overflowing. The parable speaks nothing as to his joy in getting home again, nor a word concerning the joy of being saluted by his friends and neighbours. No, the joy of having found his sheep eclipsed all other gladness of heart, and dimmed the light of home and friendship. He turns around to friends and neighbours and entreats them to help him to bear the weight of his happiness. He cries, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’ One sinner had repented, and all heaven must make holiday concerning it. Oh, brethren, there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to flood all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the

Saviour's joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream. Let us do the same. We are friends if we are not neighbours. He calls us to-day to come and bring our hearts, like empty vessels, that he may fill them with his own joy, that our joy may be full. Those of us who are saved must enter into the joy of our Lord. When I was trying to think over this text I rejoiced with my Lord in the bringing in of each of his sheep, for each one makes a heaven full of joy. But, oh to see all the redeemed brought in! Jesus would have no joy if he should lose one: it would seem to spoil it all. If the purpose of mercy were frustrated in any one instance it were a dreary defeat of the great Saviour. But his purpose shall be carried out in every instance. He 'shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.' He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall carry out the will of the Father. He shall have the full reward of his passion. Let us joy and rejoice with him this morning!

But the text tells us there was more joy over that one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray. Who are these just persons that need no repentance? Well, you should never explain a parable so as to make it run on four legs if it was only meant to go on two. There may not be such persons at all, and yet the parable may be strictly accurate. If all of us had been such persons, and had never needed repentance, we should not have given as much joy to the heart of Christ as one sinner does when he repents. But suppose it to mean you and me who have long ago repented'who have, in a certain sense, now no need of repentance, because we are justified men and women'we do not give so much joy to the heart of God, for the time being, as a sinner does when he first returns to God. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray, or a bad thing to be kept from it. You understand how that is: there are seven children in a family, and six of them are all well; but one dear child is taken seriously ill, and is brought near to the gates of death. It has recovered, its life is spared, and do you wonder that for the time being it gives more joy to the household than all the healthy ones? There is more expressed delight about it a great deal than over all those that have not been ill at all. This does not show it is a good thing to be ill. No, nothing of the kind; we are only speaking of *the joy* which comes of recovery from sickness. Take another case: you have a son who has been long away in a far country, and another son at home. You love them both equally, but when the absent son comes home he is for a season most upon your thoughts. Is it not natural that it should be so? Those at home give us joy constantly from day to day, but when the stream of joy has been dammed back by his absence, it pours down in a flood upon his return. Then we have 'high days and holy days' and 'bonfire nights.'

There are special circumstances about repentance and conversion which produce joy over a restored wanderer. There was a preceding sorrow, and this sets off the joy by contrast. The shepherd was so touched with compassion for the lost sheep, that now his sorrow is inevitably turned into joy. He suffered a dreadful suspense, and that is a killing thing; it is

like an acid eating into the soul. That suspense which makes one ask, Where is the sheep? Where can it be? is a piercing of the heart. All those weary hours of searching, and seeking, and following are painfully wearing to the heart. You feel as if you would almost sooner know that you never would find it than be in that doubtful state of mind. That suspense when it is ended naturally brings with it a sweet liberty of joy. Moreover, you know that the joy over penitents is so unselfish that you who have been kept by the grace of God for many years do not grieve that there should be more joy over a repenting sinner than over you. No, you say to yourself, 'There is good cause. I am myself among those who are glad.' You remember that good men made great rejoicing over you when you first came to Jesus; and you heartily unite with them in welcoming newcomers. You will not act the elder brother, and say, I will not share the joy of my Father. Not a bit of it; but you will enter heartily into the music and dancing, and count it your heaven to see souls saved from hell. I feel a sudden flush and flood of delight when I meet with a poor creature who once lay at hell's dark door, but is now brought to the gate of heaven. Do not you?

The one thing I want to leave with you is how our gracious Lord seems to give himself up to his own redeemed. How entirely and perfectly every thought of his heart, every action of his power, goes toward the needy, guilty, lost soul. He spends his all to bring back his banished. Poor souls who believe in him have his whole strength engaged on their behalf. Blessed be his name! Now let all our hearts go forth in love toward him, who gave all his heart to work our redemption. Let us love him. We cannot love him as he loved us as to measure; but let us do so in like manner. Let us love him with all our heart and soul. Let us feel as if we saw nothing, knew nothing, loved nothing save Jesus crucified. As we filled all *his* heart let him fill all our hearts!

Oh, poor sinner, here to-day, will you not yield to the Good Shepherd? will you not stand still as he draws near? Will you not submit to his mighty grace? Know that your rescue from sin and death must be of him, and of him alone. Breathe a prayer to him, 'Come, Lord, I wait for thy salvation! Save me, for I trust in thee.' If thou dost thus pray, thou hast the mark upon thee of Christ's sheep, for he saith, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.' Come to him, for he comes to you. Look to him for he looks to you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON' John 15:1-24.

HYMNS FROM 'OUR OWN HYMN BOOK' 387, 403, 388.