

The Parables:

According to the Greek and Hebrew definitions, a parable is "a placing of one thing beside another, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, sentences with ethical wisdom and a comparison of one thing to another." God has used this passage of Scripture to encourage my heart on several occasions. It is my prayer that you will be blessed by these truths as well. This study is for everyone who has lost hope because she has made mistakes and feels as if she is an Outcast.

Black Sheep

By Mary Kane

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Like most little children, I used to enjoy doing errands with my mother. I especially liked running errands with her if we were going to a department store that had a pet section. I was quite an animal lover when I was little and while my mom shopped, I liked gaze at all the little animals in their clean, tidy cages. For some reason, I particularly loved to watch the snails slowly scoot across the glass walls of their aquariums.

One errand day, while my mother shopped in another area of the store, as usual, I made my way to the pet section (back in the old days of long ago we never worried about kidnappers or child snatchers). I must have been completely mesmerized by the snails that day and had lost all track of time because suddenly I heard an announcement over the loud speaker asking for a little girl named "Mary" to report to the front counter as her mother was looking for her! I remember being slightly surprised that my mom was looking for me because I hadn't realized that I was lost!

Jesus does the same thing for His children—He tracks us down before we even realize that we are lost! In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus illustrates His love for those who are lost.

Please take a moment to quiet yourself before the Lord and ask God to forgive you for any transgressions you may have committed. Now please ask Him to open the eyes of your heart in order to receive from His Holy Word.

Please read Luke 15:1-7.

Please name the two very different groups of people who are named in verses 1 and 2.

This parable was designed to reach the hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees and the tax collectors and the sinners. Jesus wanted to teach the Pharisees that sinners are welcome in the Kingdom of God. That is what God is all about—calling the lost— not focusing on how well one can keep the Law.

This parable was also designed to reach the heart of the tax collectors and sinners. Jesus wanted them to know that there was a better way to live and that they were more than welcome in the Kingdom of God. Jesus came to earth to seek and to save the lost, not commend the Pharisees on their law keeping.

Describe the events of verse 1.

The sinners and the tax collectors drew near to Jesus to hear Him preach.

What do you think of when you hear the phrase “drew near”?

I think of pulling up a chair close to someone who is speaking so I can concentrate closely on what is being said. It also comes to mind that I would never draw near to someone that I did not like or from whom I sensed disapproval or derision. I usually only listen to those whom I

trust and believe have my best interests at heart. The tax collectors and sinners must have felt acceptance and welcome flowing from Jesus. They drew near to hear Him because Jesus spoke a message that they needed desperately... a message of mercy and grace. Notice that we never hear of the tax collectors and sinners drawing close to the Pharisees—no one is ever attracted to condemnation or criticism.

The original word used for *drew near* is *eggizo* which means to bring close, to approach, to join one thing to another. This word is also translated as "one who turns his thoughts towards God, to become acquainted with God, to worship God."ⁱⁱⁱ The sinners and tax collectors *drew near* to Jesus to learn a little more about God. With the exception of Nicodemus, we never hear of the Pharisees and the scribes "drawing close" to Jesus. They were not interested in becoming acquainted with God. They usually only came near to Jesus to criticize Him or attempt to ensnare Him.

Our passage tells us that the sinners and tax collectors drew near to Jesus to *hear* Him. The word used for *hear* in this verse does not mean to passively listen to something—in one ear and out the other. The Greek word used for *hear* means "to hear with understanding, to consider what is being said, to find out, to learn." The tax collectors and sinners were not just passing time with Jesus; they were listening and thinking about the message of the Gospel. And quite frankly, they were probably curious about the fact that a religious person was deeply interested in spending time in their presence. No one had ever tried to reason with tax collectors and sinners and convert them to a better way of life; the Pharisees usually avoided and shunned them.

What statement did the scribes and Pharisees make concerning Jesus (verse 2)?

The NKJV states that Jesus *received* sinners. *Received* in this case means to accept, to look for, to wait for, to give access to oneself. It can also mean "to accept into one's family." Jesus was *waiting for* and *looking for* the sinners and tax collectors so He could invite them to join His family. The Pharisees didn't understand why Jesus would associate

with sinners, so He told them “The Parable of the Lost Sheep” to explain His attitude and heart for the lost. Why did Jesus choose a parable about sheep? All of Israel would have been very familiar with sheep; they were used on a daily basis as a part of temple worship. Flocks of sheep grazing on the hillsides would have been a very common site in Israel.

Who does John 10:14 say that Jesus is?

Now please turn back to Luke 15.

Where is the focus of the Good Shepherd in Luke 15:4?

Jesus focus is not on the ninety-nine (the Pharisees) that are back in the flock; His focus is on the lost sheep (the tax collectors and the sinners).

Where is the lost sheep?

The lost sheep is in the wilderness. The ninety-nine think that they are safe. They have no need of the Shepherd, but notice that the ninety-nine are also in the wilderness; they are just as lost as the one little wandering sheep. The Good Shepherd came to seek and to save that which is lost. It is His will that none should perish.

The original Greek word used for *lost* in this passage is *apollymi* which means “to destroy, to perish, abolish, to kill, to ruin, eternal misery in hell, to declare that one must be put to death, to lose.” The lost sheep in this parable was not lost so much in the sense of physical location, but as in the sense of spiritual destiny.

Who are the lost sheep in your life?

Is there someone whom you know who is lost and you have given up on them ever coming to Christ? Perhaps you’ve been praying for a loved

one for years and now feel that they are a lost cause. According to the end of verse 4, how long are we to seek one who is lost? Until they are found! Keep praying!

How did the lamb get back to the Shepherd (verse 5)?

The Shepherd found the lost sheep. Think about this fact for a moment. The lost sheep didn't find the Shepherd by its own efforts; it didn't buy a map, or ask for directions. The Shepherd found him. The lost sheep didn't even follow the Shepherd; it rode home on His shoulders...why? Because it was lost; it did not know how to save itself. And we like the lost sheep, we are unable to save ourselves. We are not saved by our own works lest any man should boast; it is only by the power of the blood of Jesus that we become "found." And when He *finds* us He takes up the burden of our sin upon His back and carries us safely home.

Where did the Shepherd take the sheep after He found it?

Notice the sheep was not returned to the flock, the Shepherd carried him to His home!

What was the Shepherd's attitude when He found His sheep and carried it home?

He rejoiced in His work for the little sheep!

Now please look up Hebrews 12:2 and write it in the space below:

If you've ever had any doubt that Jesus would welcome you, please lay that to rest right now. He welcomes you with joy! As we learned earlier, the whole reason Jesus came to earth was to seek and to save the lost...

liars, cheaters, thieves, prostitutes, murderers, betrayers and the like. People like you and me. And He finds great joy in saving you!

How does He welcome you (please fill in the blank)?

He welcomes you with _____!

With reluctance? With regret? With Shame? No! With rejoicing! What will the Shepherd do because of His great joy according to verse 6? So great is His joy that He calls others to rejoice with Him!

Jesus really drives His point home in Luke 15:7. He tells the Pharisees that there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner coming to repentance than ninety-nine hard-hearted Pharisees who won't acknowledge their need for a Savior. We are all sheep... either we are a lost sheep in need of a Savior or we are a "used to be lost sheep" who still needs a Savior. The Pharisees acted as if they were a different breed of sheep...super sheep, completely entrenched in their pride and hypocrisy.

Let's take a moment to consider a few insights from the definition of the word *sheep*. According to *BLB*, *sheep* are:

1. **"That which walks forward."** Sheep walk forward! Have you ever witnessed a sheep walking backwards? Neither have I! Let's apply this to our own lives; after Jesus finds you, walk forward. Don't look back; don't return to what He has rescued you from; don't wander around in circles either! Walk forward. He has a plan for your life and it requires that you walk forward.
2. **"Destined for slaughter."** Before you accepted Christ for your Savior you were destined for destruction. Use your deliverance as cause to praise Him! Also, remember all the other lost sheep that are destined for destruction and need Jesus! Pray for them, witness to them!

3. **“The followers of any master.”** As sheep, we will follow someone. Our choices are: our own hearts—which are marred by sin; Satan—who is the Father of Lies and seeks only to kill steal and destroy or The Good Shepherd—the One True God, Who comes to give abundant life! I’d much rather follow Jesus! After all, He is the way, the truth and the life.

What do you need to do to walk *forward* at this time?

How can you follow the Good Shepherd more closely in your everyday life?

In closing, if you are not walking with the Shepherd at this time, if you have wandered far from Him, He is coming for you. He is calling you at this moment. You have not sinned so much that you can’t return to Him. If you have recently turned from a season of wandering, please realize that it wasn’t your idea to return to the Good Shepherd. You turned because the Shepherd was seeking you, drawing you back to fellowship with Him. Why are we drawn to Him? Ahh... sheep always recognize the voice of their own true Shepherd—the one who loves you. Listen for Him. He is calling you today.

“I am the Good Shepherd;

And I know my sheep, and I am known by My own.

As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father;

And I lay down My life for the sheep.”

John 10:14-15

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i Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *parabolē* (Strong's 3850)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 16 Aug 2010. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3850&t=KJV> >

ii Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *eggizō* (Strong's 1448)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011. 7 Jan 2011. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G1448&t=NKJV> >