

The theme for our morning's meditation is that God does not abandon his people when they go astray. God is a gracious and loving God who always seeks out the lost and the lonely and desires that they turn back to him. There are many times in our lives when we go astray from God and wander away in fulfilling our own selfish desires. Sometimes, he gives us a very long rope till we hit rock bottom and come to our senses and realize that we need God's help to run our lives. There are other times when God speaks to us through his word and his Holy Spirit to convict us and to draw us back to himself. Sometimes we may think that we have gone too far away for God to save us. But no one is outside God's reach or his love. God is actively seeking us and he does not abandon us even when we go astray.

In Luke 15 we have three parables arranged by Luke showing us that Jesus had indeed come to save the sinners and those who were lost from his grace. In the first parable it is about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep and then found that one of his sheep was missing. The shepherd counts his sheep at the end of the day and finds that one of them is missing. What he does is that he leaves the ninety-nine behind and goes after the one which is lost and brings back that sheep on his shoulder and comes home rejoicing with the community. In the second parable, the story is of a woman who has ten silver coins and has lost one of them. The ratio now increases from 1:100 to 1:10 and in the final parable it is 1:2. The woman searches for her silver coin by lighting a lamp and sweeping the house. When she finds it there is great rejoicing. Similarly, Jesus says that there will be great rejoicing in heaven over every sinner who repents. In the final parable the story is about two sons and the younger one wants to divide the property and take his share. He does that and spends all his money in wild living. In the end when he hits rock bottom he comes to his senses and realizes that it would be better for him to go back to his Father for there even the servants had a better life. This makes him repent and he goes back to the Father who welcomed him with open arms. This morning we will be looking at the first two parables.

Luke informs us that the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear Jesus and the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were muttering to themselves that Jesus was 'welcoming sinners and eating with them'. The Pharisees were feeling quite self-righteous about the company they kept as opposed to the kind of company that Jesus kept. Jesus understands what is going on in their minds and then responds with a parable about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep and had lost one of them.

What does the shepherd do when he loses one of them? He leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness and goes after the one that is lost until he finds it. The shepherd of Palestine had indeed to search until he found the animal. He either had to bring back a live animal or bring back its remains showing that some wild animals had killed it and that he had not sold it off for his personal profit. When the shepherd searches the sheep and finds it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. The picture is quite an authentic picture. Shepherds in Galilee confirm that a lost sheep will lie down helplessly and refuse to budge. The shepherd is forced to carry the sheep over a long distance. The shepherd rejoices that his sheep has been found and he calls his friends and neighbours to rejoice together.

The key theme that stands out in the parable is the joy of the shepherd in finding the lost sheep. Similarly, It is an invitation to share in joy over the conversion of sinners. Jesus is here defending his welcome of sinners. The welcome involves a restoration to a community. God's love is unconditional. He reaches out in grace.

In the second parable a woman has ten silver coins and she loses one of them. The coin was probably part of the woman's jewellery. Village women do wear coins on necklaces. The beauty of the necklace is lost when one of them is lost. The woman clearly knew that she had lost it in her house. She knew that if she kept sweeping the house diligently then the coin would be found. When she finds the coin she calls her friends and neighbours and rejoices with them because she had found the coin which she had lost. Here again the rejoicing is in community. She must have definitely told others when she had lost it and now she was rejoicing with them because she had found it.

There is celebration in heaven over one sinner that repents than ninety nine righteous ones. Christ came to seek those who were lost. It is those who were sick that needed a physician. Unless we realise we are sick and need a physician we will not be found by God. We may think that we are the righteous ones and look down on others who are living in sin. But God's love reaches out to them as well and they may respond faster than us to God's love and repent. And when they do there will be great celebration in heaven. But we need to watch out that we do not depend on our own righteousness and see no need for God's grace to save us.