

The Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:1-5,10-14 & Luke 15:1-7

Learning Objectives

- Consider how important the marginalized are to God
- Reflect on how Jesus is the Good Shepherd who goes to reclaim his sheep
- Evaluate our own pride and view of our role in salvation

? When was the last time you lost something valuable? Did you find it?

Read out loud: These are parallel passages in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Read both together to see some of the common and distinct notes that the two Gospel writers captured.

Matthew 18:1-5,10-14 (NIV)	Luke 15:1-7 (NIV)
<p>¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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. ¹¹</p> <p>¹² “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</p>	<p>¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”</p> <p>³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says,</p>

heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.	'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.
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Understanding the Passage

? Who is Jesus' intended audience for this parable?

Possible Answers: Pharisees, disciples, people with some real status or proximity to Jesus (and therefore some status).

? How would you expect the audience to react to this parable? What is it about the audience that Jesus is challenging?

Possible Answers: Their prideful attitudes about station and being 'in'. Going along with cultural norms that keep people in the margins.

? Why would the children that Jesus refers to be 'despised'?

Possible Answers: They were perhaps just burdens until they eventually were old/strong enough to work. Or, they were considered not important or not valuable.

? Who does the rescuer in the parable represent?

Possible Answers: Jesus (in Luke 15), and perhaps us as his disciples (Matthew 18).

Looking Deeper

? How are children and sheep related in this passage? What is their significance?

Possible Answers: The passage is not referencing children as if they are "innocent," but rather that they are dependent on others. The children are dependent on their parents/guardians as the sheep are reliant on the shepherd.

? What does this parable tell us about the Kingdom of God and its values?

Possible Answers: The kingdom of God is for the humble and lowly, and the humble and lowly will be sought out and brought in.

? How does this parable challenge Jesus' audience?

Possible Answers: Both (all) audiences had an attitude of us versus them, which is not something that God's people are to emphasize (God does the sorting, we do the laboring). There was pride to the point of exclusion, and Jesus demonstrates a servanthood that draws others in.

? How are the disciples (in Matthew) and the Pharisees (in Luke) different from the children and the sheep?

Possible Answers: It is as though both groups are more interested in preserving their spot on the inside. They were 'in the know' with respect to their culture, though perhaps the disciples did have a lowly position. In some respects, they were already 'found.'

? What is the significance of the shepherd leaving ninety-nine in order to seek after the one?

Possible Answers: Not only is God concerned with his people as a whole, but he also has special concern for each individual.

Transitional thought:

If you had 10 friends, and one never shows up to your parties, what would you do with that friend?

If you had 10 children, and you had all of them in tow, but one wandered off in the grocery store, what would you do?

Taking it In

? Is this parable familiar? How do you normally think about this parable?

? How can we exemplify the values of the kingdom that we just discussed? Does the passage call something to mind?

? Are there groups or people that you tend to overlook or write off? How should understanding ourselves as lost sheep change our behavior towards those we may be tempted to marginalize?