

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP: THE LOST SINNER OUT IN THE WORLD LUKE 15:01–07

Introduction

Chapter 15 is one of the most important chapters in all the Bible. It includes three of the most famous parables ever told. The parables deal with the lost sinner and the great love of God in seeking and receiving the lost sinner when the sinner repents and returns home. The first parable is that of the Lost Sheep in the wilderness of the world.

- I. Tax collectors and sinners drew near Jesus (w. 1-3).
- II. The sheep was lost (v.4).
- III. The sheep was lost because of self (v.4).
- IV. The sheep was lost “in the wilderness or open country” (v.4).
- V. The sheep was sought until found (v.4).
- VI. The sheep, once found, brought great joy (w.5-6).
- VII. The sheep represented a repentant sinner (v.7).

I. *Luke 15:01–03 Separation; Spiritual Hunger*

Tax-collectors and sinners drew near Jesus. Note they “all” drew near to Him. This shows two things.

1. They were hungry for His message. They were not coming out of curiosity, nor to observe, nor to seek physical blessings; they were coming out of a spiritual need, out of the need to receive His message of salvation.
2. They acknowledged their great need. Publicans, that is, tax-collectors, worked for the Roman government, the nation that had conquered Israel. Therefore, they were considered traitors to both Israel and God. Consequently, they were despised by the people and were cut off and shut out by the religionists. Sinners were the rank immoral and unjust who did not keep the law, such as harlots (see Mt.21:32), liars, thieves, murderers. All these were *sinner*s, traitors to both God and man, and they knew it. So when Christ came along preaching deliverance from sin and hope of the Kingdom of God, they flocked to Him.

The attitude of the religionists was tragic. They grumbled against Jesus because He associated and ate with such terrible sinners. They felt it was beneath the dignity of any respectable person to associate with such vile sinners. Note an important point: Christ was *not of the world*, but He was *out in the world* trying to reach men for God. It is this that is often overlooked by both the liberals and the separatists.

- The true believer is to “come out from them [the world] and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:17-18). He is not to be out in the world with sinners doing worldly things and carrying on worldly conversation (Eph.4:29; Col.4:6).
- The true believer is to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation [sinners]” (Mk.16:15). The believer goes; he does not sit back and wait on sinners to come to him and the church. He goes out where the sinners are.

Thought 1. If the *whole gospel* — all of the good news — were preached today in power and authority, how many would be flocking to hear...

- the gospel of salvation from sin and death?
- the gospel of the hope for the Kingdom of God See *Kingdom of God*, Mt. 19: 23-24)

Christ answered the religionists by sharing three great parables. The first parable is one of the most-loved stories ever told, the parable of the lost sheep.

II. *Luke 15:04 Sheep*

The sheep was lost. The sheep represents the unbeliever, the sinner who wanders out in the wilderness (open country) of the world, the person who has gone astray and is lost to God. Note the meaning of the word lost.

LUKE 15:04 LOST (APOLLUMI)

Lose means to perish, to destroy, to lose, to lose eternal life, to be spiritually destitute, to be cut off. □

III. *Luke 15:04 Lost Sheep, Lost Man*

The sheep was lost because of self. A sheep loses itself in one of five ways.

1. The sheep is attracted by something out “in the open country (wilderness),” away from the flock of the shepherd. What the sheep sees is more attractive and appealing. It tempts and seduces him, and he lusts after it (“the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes,” 1 Jn. 2:16).
2. The sheep is aimless, not paying attention to what is going on. It aimlessly wanders off, and while it is *getting lost*, the sheep does not know it is losing its way. The sheep is already lost when it finds it has lost its way.
3. The sheep refuses to heed the warnings of the shepherd and the example of the other sheep (“the boasting of what he has and does”, 1 Jn.2:16).

4. The sheep is not attached enough to the shepherd or to the other sheep. There is not the bond or union there should be. Therefore, he stays off by himself, eating and resting and working alone until eventually he wanders off without anyone's knowing it, including himself (Heb.10:25).
5. The sheep does not trust the shepherd. It does not think the shepherd will take care and see that there is satisfying food. It goes astray *in search of greener pasture and more satisfying food* (Note Mt.18:14 for the help of others needed by the shepherd to care for the sheep).

Isa 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Prov 21:16 A man who strays from the path of understanding comes to rest in the company of the dead.

Prov 27:8 Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home.

Lam 4:14 Now they grope through the streets like men who are blind. They are so defiled with blood that no one dares to touch their garments.

Jer 2:13 "My People have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

Jer 15:6 You have rejected me," declares the LORD. "You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion.

Mat 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

Heb 10:38 "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

2 Pet 2:15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

Jude 1:13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

IV. Luke 15:04 Open Country, Wilderness — World, Worldliness

The sheep was lost in the open country or wilderness. The open country had an excitement about it. The unknown and the risk aroused the emotions; but once the sheep ventured out into the open country, he found its terrain rugged, full of narrow ridges and deep ravines and crevices. It was rough going, heavy with thick underbrush, pricking thorns, dangerous footing; and, if the way out were never found, it would sap the sheep's strength and age him ever so rapidly. Eventually the open country would take its life.

The open country and thrills of the world do attract a person. The world has much to offer.

1. The world gives a man...

- occupation and purpose
- ego and self-esteem
- more and more honor
- plenty and wealth
- authority and power
- lifestyle and acceptance
- recognition and privilege
- position and image
- opportunity and satisfaction

2. The world stimulates and arouses a man, causing...

- his blood to rush
- his heart to beat faster
- goose bumps
- butterflies
- escape
- cravings
- desires
- relaxation

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Gal 5:19-21 *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Jer 50:6 *“My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.”*

Ezek 34:6 *My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.*

Mat 9:36 *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

V. **Luke 15:04 Seeking the Lost**

The sheep was sought until found. Note four things.

1. The lost sheep was sought (v. 4). The shepherd left the ninety-nine to seek the one lost sheep. The ninety-nine were safe; they were already in the shepherd's fold. But the one sheep was lost. It was the one that needed to be sought. It was this sheep that needed the attention of the shepherd and was to occupy the time, energy, and effort of the shepherd. As long as the sheep was lost, seeking it was the primary purpose and reason for the shepherd. (What a lesson for the church and ministers!)

2. The search was urgent. The shepherd went after the lost sheep (v.4). He was gripped with concern. He went after the one lost sheep as though it were the only one. Note the shepherd's dedication and commitment to seeking the lost.
3. The shepherd sought until he found the sheep. He did not seek complacently or slowly, as though there were plenty of time. Nor did he give up, despite the difficulties that lay along the rough terrain and the weariness of the long hours and the tediousness of running into dead end after dead end. He sought and kept on seeking until he found the lost sheep. He never slackened, never backed off, never gave up.
4. When the shepherd found the sheep, he embraced the sheep and threw it over his shoulders. He received it...
 - with arms wide open
 - embracing it
 - rejoicing in heart
 - supporting and carrying it to his home (v.6)

Isa 53:5-6 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

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

Psa 119:176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

VI. Luke 15:05–06 The Result: Salvation

Once found, the sheep bought great joy. Note what the shepherd did.

1. He called all his neighbors together. He wanted everyone to know that the lost sheep had been found. Everyone had been so concerned-praying, hoping, waiting. They wanted to join in the rejoicing.
2. Everyone rejoiced because the shepherd's labor was not in vain.
3. The shepherd tenderly called the lost sheep "which was lost." It was his, no matter how dirty, filthy, unclean, destitute, depraved, ugly or lost it had been. It was still the shepherd's sheep.

Note that God did not send an angel as a servant, but He sent His Son to seek the lost (see Isa 53:4-6, 10-12).

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

1 Pet 2:24-25 “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

I. Luke 15:07 Repentance

The sheep represents a repentant sinner. A sinner must repent (See *Repentance*, Acts 17:29-30).

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Isa 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Ezek 18:21 “But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.” ■