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DIVINE CARE FOR THE LOST.

– LUKE 15:1-10. – OCT. 21. –

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

LOST, AS USED in connection with mankind, has quite a different meaning in the Bible from that commonly given it in modern theology. The latter uses the term "lost" in connection with reprobates, for whom there is no hope; it implies, according to "orthodoxy," hopeless, endless, eternal torment. But from the Scriptural standpoint the word "lost" is used in an almost opposite sense, as will be noted in the lesson before us.

Our Lord, holy in word and in conduct, naturally would draw to himself especially the holiness people of his day, and these were the Pharisees, amongst whom, however, were many whose holiness was of a hypocritical character, – delighting in outward show rather than in purity and holiness of heart. Recent lessons showed us our Lord the guest and companion of prominent Pharisees, and how he improved the opportunity to preach the gospel to them as well as to others. But the Pharisees, accustomed to thinking of themselves as the holier class of the Jews, had gradually separated themselves from the lower elements of that people, so that in our Lord's time the two classes mingled very little; the Pharisees refusing to acknowledge the others as brethren and fellow-heirs of the divine promises. Consequently, when they perceived that the lower classes of the Jews were interested in Jesus' teachings, and that Jesus did not hold himself aloof from them, but mingled with and taught them just the same as others, they wondered, and this inclined them to repudiate Jesus, whom they would have been glad to have had as one of their number if he had been willing to be known as a Pharisee and to conform to their customs. It was to correct

the wrong ideas of these Pharisees that Jesus gave five parables, which we are about to consider, – two of them in this lesson.

The parable of the true shepherd who, loving his sheep and caring for them, left the ninety and nine well cared for by under-shepherds in the wilds (not in a desert) and went after the one lost sheep until he found it, gives us an illustration of the divine care. Possibly our Lord meant no further lesson than this to be taken from his words; but if we shall suppose that the parable was intended to be applied in its varied particulars, and to illustrate features of the divine plan of salvation, we would be obliged to suppose that the one sheep that was lost represented Adam and the human family, and that the ninety and nine never lost, but remaining under the shepherd's care, were the angels and other spirit beings, who never wandered into sin and away from God; and who always have been under his supervision and care. In this view the shepherd going after the straying sheep would represent our Lord Jesus, leaving the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, and coming into human conditions in the interest of mankind.

To take any other detailed view of the parable than this would seem inconsistent; as, for instance, to suppose that the lost sheep represented the degraded element of humanity, and ninety-nine sheep a holiness class, would be inconsistent in two ways: (1) "There is none righteous, no, not one," is the Scriptural declaration; and again, as the prophet has declared, "we *all* like sheep have gone astray." (Rom. 3:10; Isa. 53:6.) (2) Even if it should be claimed that the ninety-nine represented some who are relatively whole, tho not actually so, the illustration would be inapt; because it will not be questioned that only a small minority – one in ten thousand, or one in a hundred thousand of earth's sixteen hundred millions, is even in a condition of reckoned and relative harmony with Jehovah, the Great Shepherd.

Viewing the one sheep as representing the whole of humanity, fallen in Adam and straying far from paths of righteousness, and

viewing Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the representative of the Father, the Great Shepherd (Psa. 23:1), we see that the work of going after the lost sheep began at our Lord's first advent. We see the cost to our Savior incidental to his start for the recovery of the sheep, but we do not yet see the sheep recovered; for in no sense of the word is mankind brought back into harmony with God. We do, however, see that during this Gospel age God is selecting from humanity an elect Church, to be the body of Christ – members of the Good Shepherd, under Jesus as the Head; and we see that it is costing every member of the body something to prepare to join in this work of seeking the lost sheep – humanity in general – during the Millennial age.

Already the sheep is found, in the sense of being located; indeed, in that sense of the word it was not lost. But as it was lost, in the sense of having wandered from God into sin and degradation, in the same sense of the word it must be recovered or brought back, by processes of *restitution* (Acts 3:19-21) out of degradation, out of the mire of sin, and the horrible pit of iniquity and death. It will require the entire Millennial age to bring back the sheep in the full, perfect sense of the parable; but meanwhile our Lord assures us that every step in this great plan for human salvation is viewed with interest by the heavenly host, the sheep who strayed not from the Father's fold: and the figure changing a little in our Lord's explanation, and no longer represented by one sheep, but by many (even as the human family, tho originally one, is now many), he declares that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth – that returns to the fold, to harmony with God. **[R2706 : page 299]**

Those now returning to harmony with God are accepted in the Beloved, and justified freely from all things by the grace that was in him, and are, in the language of the Apostle, "returning to the Shepherd and Caretaker of their souls" (1 Pet. 2:25); and called to be co-laborers with the Good Shepherd, as members of his "body."

In the case of Father Adam, the one original straying sheep, as in the case of many of his posterity, the lost condition is not the desirable one – far rather would he and many others have gone back again to the fold from which he strayed; but in the degradation and mire of sin, they became so degraded and helpless that it was impossible for them to *return* in their own strength by the way in which they went. They needed a Savior – one able to save them unto the uttermost – able to recover them fully from all condemnation of sin, and to bring them back completely into the fold of God; and just such an one the Heavenly Father has provided in our Lord Jesus: "He is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto the Father through him."

True, there will be a class, as the Scriptures clearly show, who, after having received at the Lord's hands all the blessings and opportunities which his love has provided for their recovery, will still persist in wilfulness – self-will, and thus spurn the Good Shepherd's [R2707 : page 299] proffered assistance. These, in the Scriptures, are said to "sin wilfully after they have come to a knowledge of the truth;" for such, the Apostle declares, there remains no longer an interest in the great sacrifice, and "it is impossible to renew" or recover them. Respecting the course of such it is written, "There is a sin unto death; I do not say that ye should pray for it." Whoever thus sins wilfully and persistently puts himself beyond the reach of the Good Shepherd, and dies the Second Death, and thus ceases to have any part or lot in the divine plan. (Heb. 6:4-6; 1 John 5:16.) It was not for the "goat" class that the Good Shepherd gave his life, and seeks in the desert; nor for the "wolves;" but merely for those who retain something at least of the "sheep" nature, despite their degradation in sin. Adam was a "sheep," or, as the Scriptures declare, a "son of God" (Luke 3:38); and while his transgression was a wilful one, in some respects, we have no reason to suppose that it was more than a *wandering* of the "sheep" from the fold, into ways of self-will: it did not mean a change of nature from a sheep disposition to that of a goat or a wolf. It did not mean that Adam preferred to be a "child of the devil."

Had Adam at heart become intelligently and wilfully an enemy of God and of righteousness we cannot suppose that the all-wise Shepherd would have sent his Son after him as a "sheep." True, many of the children of Adam today have attained marked characteristics of goat nature, and, as the Apostle declares, are "enemies of God through wicked works." (Col. 1:21.) Nevertheless, the Apostle also explains that many of these are in this condition, not wilfully, but because they have been deceived by Satan into putting light for darkness and darkness for light; – the eyes of their understanding have been deceived. He explained that the "god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them that believe not" lest they should see the glorious light of truth. (2 Cor. 4:4.) Many of these, then, who through association with the Adversary have become goat-like in many respects, still have something of the sheep nature, which, under proper enlightenment, would assert itself and be glad to have the Good Shepherd restore them fully to divine favor and the fold.

From this standpoint, which we believe is the true one, and the only one in harmony with the various features of the parable, we perceive that God takes no account whatever of those who will go into the Second Death; they will have no existence whatever, so far as God and his plan are concerned, from the moment they lose the sheep nature. And the one sheep which our Lord will recover during restitution times, and by the close of the Millennium bring fully back into the fold of God, will be *the human family* as God has recognized it from the first; *viz.*, those created in God's image and likeness, and who never fully lose that image and likeness, and in whom his image and likeness will be revived and restored during the Millennium. The lost sheep, which originally was represented in one (Adam and Eve) in its recovery will be represented by hundreds of millions of the redeemed and restored of mankind.

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER.

The parable of the woman who, having a bracelet on which were hung ten pieces of silver – a marriage token – on losing one of these

set diligently to work until she found it, is another representation of the same thought expressed foregoing. The woman's energy in seeking for the lost piece of silver is given by our Lord as an illustration of *divine energy* on behalf of *lost humanity*. And here again we see that the Scriptures use the word "lost" in reference to the original loss, and not at all in respect to those who will be destroyed in the Second Death – the latter are not said to be lost; they cease to exist; they are not reckoned in the divine calculations at all, and not worthy to be mentioned. They are not at all like the original that was lost, which God recognized and proposes to recover.

The ten pieces of silver were not only of value, but each had stamped upon it, as is the custom with coin, a certain image or likeness. And so with all the sons of God, angels, archangels, and we know not how many [R2707 : page 300] other orders of spirit beings, were made in the *image* and *likeness* of God. It was one of these that was lost – the human one, man. And it was that which was lost that was sought, and ultimately found.

The houses of olden times, lighted mainly through the doorway, with the floors of earth (clay or sand or stones) more or less littered and defiled, well represented the condition of sin and degradation in which mankind was lost, as represented in father Adam, who bore the image and likeness of God, as represented in the lost coin of the parable. The parable does not represent the processes of restitution, but merely the original loss and the ultimate recovery of the *same thing that was lost*, and the energy put forth to this end. The lighting of the candle and the sweeping diligently represent the work of God through the Christ, which will be accomplished by the end of the Millennial age, when that which was lost and sought for, will have been fully recovered.

The restored race, when returned to the heavenly Father at the close of the Millennial age will, each and all, be as perfect in his image and likeness as was Adam in his creation, with the added benefits of larger knowledge and fuller appreciation of the divine One, whose

likeness they will bear. No account is taken in this parable, either, of the increase in the numbers of the human family, nor of those members of Adam's posterity who, by reason of wilful sin (the love of sin more than righteousness) will be "destroyed from amongst the people." (Acts 3:23.) They have no standing in the Father's sight; indeed, the Father takes no cognizance of any except that which was lost, and that which will ultimately be restored to him by his faithful representative, Christ, who seeks and finds.

The great time of rejoicing, both in heaven and in earth, will come at the close of the Millennial age, when all things in heaven and in earth will be heard praising Him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb; but now, in advance of the complete rejoicing, our Lord assures us that all the heavenly host rejoices in every evidence of the accomplishment of the great work; rejoices over one sinner that repenteth – who fully turns from sin to harmony with God. And if the angels in heaven rejoice, so, in proportion as they are in harmony with God and the heavenly beings, will all who profess to be God's people on earth have rejoicing in the recovery of fellow-creatures out of the snare and blindness of sin and Satan.

This was the particular lesson which our Lord sought to impress upon the Pharisees – that instead of holding themselves aloof from, and feeling offended at, those who were hearing Jesus gladly, they should, if they were in harmony with God and the heavenly holy ones, have rejoiced to see any evidence of repentance and reformation; and should have been glad to assist back into harmony with God those who, as the Apostle expresses it, were "feeling after God, if haply they might find him." – Acts 17:27.

And this must be the attitude of all the Lord's people to-day: if they have not this sentiment of heart it is an evidence that they have not the spirit of the Lord. And to have such a feeling of loving interest in the recovery of others out of sin, and a disposition to assist them back to harmony with God, not only is an evidence of a condition of heart

which is in harmony with God, but will be found to be an aid to such themselves, an assistance in making straight paths for their feet, that they themselves, under the Shepherd's care, may ultimately reach the fold in safety.

So then, let all of the Lord's dear people who have already been found by the Good Shepherd, and who have accepted his loving care and assistance back to God, cultivate more and more the spirit of sympathy for others, and of helpfulness and cooperation in the work in which the Good Shepherd is engaged – not yet in seeking for humanity as a whole, but now specially in rendering assistance to those whom the Lord is, in the present age, seeking out as the "first-fruits" of his work and victory, – edifying one another, building one another up in the most holy faith, encouraging one another: helping one another to put on the wedding garment, and to be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, as joint-heirs in the Kingdom. – 1 Thess. 5:11; Jude 20; Col. 1:12; Rom. 8:17.
