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HEAVENLY INTEREST IN SINNERS

– APRIL 26. – LUKE 15:1-10. –

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." – Verse 10.

BIBLE STUDENTS should always seek to view the jewels of the Lord's Word in the settings in which they have been placed. To neglect this is to lose a portion of the lesson intended. The Scribes and the Pharisees held themselves aloof from the common people – the Scribes, because the masses were illiterate; and the Pharisees, under the claim that the people were sinners, cut off from relationship to God, and therefore not proper to be recognized by the holy of humanity, which they claimed to be.

Jesus, however, received the common people, even the publicans, acknowledged sinners. His superior knowledge did not make Him haughty, and His superior righteousness did not make Him proud and unsympathetic. He has set His followers an example that they should walk in His steps. And the more closely they follow Him, the more pleasing will they be to the Father, and the more ready for a share in the Kingdom for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

Our lesson tells us how the Pharisees and the scribes murmured against Jesus, charging against Him as a sin that He received sinners and ate with them. Whatever did not harmonize with their standards they could only contest. Their difficulty in part was that they had too high an opinion of themselves. Their spirit in this matter was an evil one, begotten of the Adversary. Hence Jesus sometimes spoke of them as being children of the Devil, because his works they did, and his spirit they had. But even this does not signify that the Pharisees were [R5427 : page 92] beyond hope of salvation. Did not Jesus address St. Peter on one occasion, saying,

"Get thee behind Me, Satan (adversary)"? He was an adversary, had the adverse spirit at the time; but, corrected in harmony with the Lord's spirit, everything was changed.

So it is with us. "His servants ye are to whom ye render service." "By their fruits shall ye know them," said the Master. Applying His words to many who profess to be His disciples, we are bound to suppose that either intentionally or ignorantly they are in opposition to the Master's Spirit and teachings – adversaries of His teachings.

Jesus, knowing the thoughts of the Pharisees, and perhaps noting their gestures and looks or hearing their words, answered them in a parable, saying, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it?" And finding it, he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing, and tells the fact to his neighbors exultantly. This course of the shepherd, Jesus declared, illustrates the attitude of God and all the holy angels associated with Him. They have a special feeling of interest in those who have strayed, and especially rejoice in the recovery of such. There is more rejoicing over the repentant sinner than over ninety and nine just persons needing no repentance.

Oh, how encouraging it is to us to know that this is the sentiment of Heaven, and that the fall of man and our imperfections do not stand as a perpetual bar to recognition by the Lord, if we return to Him! He is merciful, and will abundantly pardon, and will remove our sins from us as far as the East is from the West. But this interest is in the repentant one or in the one who has not sinned beyond repentance. Any sheep, having been found by the Shepherd and then preferring the wolfish, would no longer be interesting to the Heavenly ones.

Many apply this parable inconsistently. They seem to think of the whole world of mankind as representing the flock of a hundred

sheep, and the one straying as representing the sinners of earth, comparatively few. Surely this cannot be the true interpretation! Rather, as the Prophet has declared, "All we like sheep have gone astray." "There is none righteous, no not one."

Let us rather interpret the parable on a broader scale, in comportment with the facts and the Scriptures. Let us understand the one stray sheep to represent Adam and his family; and the ninety and nine just persons needing no repentance as representing the holy angels. To this view every feature of the parable inclines. The Good Shepherd left the Heavenly flock and came to earth to find, to redeem, to recover, mankind, the lost sheep; and there is more rejoicing in Heaven over human recoveries from sin and alienation from God than over the holy ones themselves, than over each other, who have never been alienated, never needed redemption. [R5427 : page 93]

The lesson to the Pharisees is plain. They had a different spirit from that of the holy ones. Theirs was an earthly view, a selfish one, a proud and haughty one, out of accord with the Divine spirit, and not pleasing to God. Jesus would have all of His disciples copy God. "Be ye like unto your Father which is in Heaven." "He is kind to the unthankful." "His mercy endureth forever" – to a full completeness.

His mercy sent His Son, the Under Shepherd, to be our Redeemer, and to help us back into His favor. His mercy will pursue the lost sheep until every member of Adam's race shall have been brought to a knowledge of the Truth and to a full opportunity of returning to the fold of God. To this end the Messianic Kingdom is to be established. To this end also is the present call for the Church, to be a Royal Priesthood, that under the guidance of the great Deliverer, they may be co-laborers with Him in carrying the Message of God's grace to all the members of Adam's family.

Oh, how different this view of our loving Creator from the one which was handed down to us from the Dark Ages! How different from the one which represented the Almighty as angry in a vicious sense! – as having prepared in advance a place for the eternal torture of the human family, except a few who would have the hearing ears and happen to hear the Message in the present life. On the contrary, we find that God's loving provision is only beginning to be manifested, in His favor toward Christ and the Church; and that ultimately the knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth, until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, to the glory of God.

THE LOST COIN

In proportion as we become Godlike we have an interest in sinners – especially in those who through heredity or evil environment are more deeply steeped in sin, ignorance and superstition. Having God's Spirit, we are glad to do anything in our power to reach these sinners. Nevertheless, we are not to be wise above what is written. We are not to expect to find all the sheep. Rather, we are to prepare as many as the Lord our God shall call and draw to be associated with the great Chief Shepherd in the work which He shortly will institute, the work of seeking the lost sheep and finding it and restoring it – all the willing and obedient.

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save (recover) that which was lost." The race was lost, not merely a few, the Church; and their recovery is to include all that was lost. This does not signify universalism, but will be accomplished in bringing every member of Adam's race to a full knowledge of God and to full opportunity of recovery from sin and death. – 1 Timothy 2:3,4.

Jesus gave another parable of similar import, to illustrate the same great truth from another angle. It was the custom among Jewish women to wear on the forehead a fringe of coin bangles. These might be of gold or silver, and sometimes represented her

dowry. The loss of one of these coins would represent more than its intrinsic value; for its absence marred the beauty of the bangles. The search for the coin would mean that, instead of its being abandoned as not worthy of consideration, it would be hunted for diligently until found. The female neighbors would learn of the loss, and also learn if it were found, and would rejoice with her greatly. This is another illustration of joy in the presence of the angels of God over one repentant sinner.

THE VALUE OF A MAN

Jesus said, "Are ye not of much more value than many sparrows?" And in the present lesson He intimates that a man is of much more value than many coins and of much more value than many sheep. We all agree that it would be difficult to estimate too highly, too fully, the value of a human life, especially if it were our own life or the life of some one dear to us. But to what extent do we manifest this in our daily lives?

Each should put the question to himself first, before applying it to his neighbors. How do I manifest the spirit of God toward my fellow-men, in placing as the first object of my interest a human life? What am I doing day by day that substantiates my professed interest in humanity in general? How am I showing my interest in my friends, my relatives, my children, my brothers and my sisters?

The manufacturer should take up this subject and ask himself, To what extent am I placing coin as of more value than humanity? To what extent am I allowing the accumulation of coin to interfere with the making and the giving of proper protection to my employees and all for whose welfare I have a care, a responsibility? Their fingers, their eyes, their limbs, their health, their lives, should be precious to every one who has the Spirit of God to the slightest degree.

Each Christian should ask himself, How much of God's Spirit have I? How much of my time am I giving to helping my fellow-men out of their difficulties and trials back to God? How much am I sacrificing of my time and strength in going after the lost sheep? Harken to the Apostle, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." "He that doeth righteousness is righteous" – and not merely he that professes to be a follower of Jesus.

Nevertheless, we are not to forget that God is the One chiefly interested in this great work, and that He has sent forth His Son for its accomplishment. We are not to forget that not only we have an interest, but that Divine interest and love are greater than ours, and that Divine wisdom is superior; and our course should be to give strict heed to "Him that speaketh from Heaven," to follow His course, His example.

This may mean that we shall to some extent be misunderstood by others. There are many theories for saving the world by social uplift, political uplift, moral uplift, vice-fighting, etc. Undoubtedly, the principle remains always true that there are but two great Captains in the warfare between sin and righteousness; namely, Christ and Satan. It remains true also that whoever is fighting for the One is fighting against the other. It is for us to make sure, first of all, that we are on the Lord's side, on the side of righteousness, truth, purity and goodness. There is still a further step – to make sure that we are fighting as our Captain would wish us to fight; that we are laboring as He would wish us to labor; that we are spending ourselves as He would wish us to be spent.

"This is the will of God (concerning you), even your sanctification." Thus our personal salvation comes first, in God's order. Reconciled to God ourselves and consecrated to His service, we inquire, What is the next step? The answer comes, "Feed My sheep; feed My lambs." At first we might be disposed to demur, to say, Lord, should we not rather go after the straying, after the lost

sheep? The answer is given by the Lord, through the Apostle, that we are to "do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially unto the Household of Faith." If, therefore, the Household of Faith demands all of our time when we have the opportunity, we may be doing nothing for the lost sheep, but only helping to perfect those whom the Lord has already found. **[R5428 : page 94]**

The circumstances of the Lord's providence alone can direct our course. When we see His purpose, His object, in this arrangement, all is clear. He is taking out of the world a peculiar people, to be joint-heirs with His Son in the Kingdom; and they all need education along spiritual lines for their own development, and to fit and prepare them to be the Royal Priesthood – to be kings and Priests unto God – who by and by are to judge, to chasten, to uplift, to bless, all the world, in proportion as they shall prove willing and obedient.

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