

Jesus' love for his little flock

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Preacher: Julian Rebera

[0 : 00] Well, good morning everybody and welcome to this pre-recorded service for Sunday the 14th! Happy Valentine's Day. I'm recording this ahead of time as you can see. My name's Philip Wells.

I'm a pastor elder at our church here, which is Calvary Church in Brighton on the south coast of England. So a very, very warm welcome to you, whether you're regular or visiting. And I'm going to lead off, but the sermon, the preaching is going to be brought to us by our good friend Julian Ribera from New Life Church Brighton, or we say New Life Church Moolscum, but that's who's going to be speaking. So I'll look forward to handing over to him in due course. Now, the order of events is up there on the screen by my head. So I've welcomed and introduced. And in a moment we'll sing, but let me read from Isaiah chapter 40, verses 9 to 11. Here's from the Old Testament prophet.

Looking ahead to the way God will deal with his people in time to come. You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout. Lift it up. Do not be afraid.

Say to the towns of Judah, here is your God. See, the sovereign Lord comes with power. His arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him. And his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd and gathers the sheep and gathers the lambs in his arms. He carries them close to his heart.

He gently leads those that have young. And here's a picture of the almighty, sovereign, glorious, all-powerful God, yet tenderly leading his flock like a shepherd, looking after the lambs and the mummy sheep that are looking after their lambs. He gently leads those that have young.

[2 : 34] So here's God in his tenderness, looking after this little flock, these little ones that he has redeemed. And that's something of what is going to be touched on later. But let's just now sing Psalm 100. This psalm invites us, all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. His praises tell. Come before him and rejoice. And this song says that part of the reason for doing that is not only God's greatness, but the fact that he's redeemed us and brought us to be his people, the sheep of his pasture. So we're going to sing Psalm 100.

Psalm 100. This psalm invites us, all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Serve him with joy, his praises tell. Come now before him and rejoice. And this psalm and rejoice. Know that the Lord is God indeed. He formed us all without our aid. We are the flock he loves to feed.

As sheep who by his hand are made. O enter then his gates with praise, and in his courts his love proclaim.

Give thanks and bless him all your days. Let every tongue confess his name.

The Lord our mighty God is good. His mercy is forever sure. His truth at all times firmly stood.

[5 : 22] And shall from age to age and do. So having sung together, let's pray together. And following the prayer which I'll lead, let's say together the Lord's Prayer, which is up on the screen there, the Our Father Prayer.

So let's pray together. Shout for joy to the Lord.

Around us here on earth. There's all sorts of things that would make us a bit despondent perhaps, or cause us to be weary or frustrated. But we ask that you would help us to lift our eyes up to heaven where you are seated.

And to come into the presence of the God who sovereignly and wisely looks after all things, and from his throne disposes all things.

You seem fit to send this virus, Lord, in your wisdom. And we bow before that. We don't want to complain that you have made a mistake, but rather bow before your purposes.

[6 : 56] And pray that you will fulfil all your purposes. For your people and bringing to yourself those who are not yet your people. We praise you that you are our creator.

That it has pleased you in this world full of stuff to make people, and how important people are to you. Thank you that you've made us in your image. And we thank you that your focus of attention is upon us.

What is man that you are mindful of him? We look at all the stars, and then we think, what is man that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him. And we thank you that that psalm draws our thoughts to Jesus Christ, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, but is now on high, crowned with glory and honour.

So we come to bring our praise to our almighty Saviour. We come to bring our praise to Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. And we come in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, the gift whom you have given to us in this age of grace.

And we pray that according to his working within us, we will be made more like Jesus Christ. We pray that resurrection power would be at work within your people.

[8 : 17] And we pray that your church would authenticate the gospel and show that people really are changed by the grace of God. And we pray that your word would go out with credibility.

Open doors, Lord, for the gospel. And we thank you for the many churches in the Sussex Gospel Partnership who have many opportunities to make you known.

Perhaps we're a bit envious of those opportunities, but give us opportunities too. And bless the work of your kingdom across Sussex and across our city.

And we pray for our brother Julian and the church that he leads, that you would prosper and bless them. So hear our prayers, accept our praises, be our God and may your glory be seen.

And let's pray the prayer that's up on the screen there as we continue in prayer. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[9 : 21] Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever.

Amen. The place for the Christian to run in danger and trouble is to the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's sing this song in the sort of contemporary arrangement.

I think it's an old song actually. Afflicted saint to Christ draw near, encouraging us to draw near to Jesus Christ. Afflicted saint to Christ draw near, your Saviour's gracious promise here, his faithful word you can believe, that as your days your strength shall be.

Your faith is weak, your foes are strong, and if the conflict should be long, the Lord will make a tent of flee, that as your days your strength shall be.

[11 : 19] So sing with joy, afflicted one, the battle's fierce, but the victory's won.

God shall supply all that you need, yet as your days your strength shall be.

Should persecution rage and flame, still trust in your Redeemer's name, in fiery trials you shall see, that as your days your strength shall be.

So sing with joy, afflicted one, the battle's fierce, but the victory's won.

The battle's fierce, but the victory's won. Your child shall supply all that you need, yet as your days your strength shall be.

[12 : 51] When called to bear your weighty cross, or sore affliction, pain or loss, or deep distress, or poverty, still as your days your strength shall be.

So sing with joy, afflicted one, the battle's fierce, but the victory's won.

God shall supply all that you need, yes as your days your strength shall be.

The passage that Julian's going to bring to us and preach from is in Matthew chapter 18.

He's going to focus on verses 10 to 14, but let's hear a little bit more of that chapter. And

Rosemary's going to read to us from Matthew chapter 18, the first 20 verses.

[14 : 26] Matthew 18 verses 1 to 20. At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child and had him stand among them.

And he said, I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name, welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin. Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come. If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.

[15 : 45] It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. See that you do not look down on one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

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 and look for the one that wandered off?

And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

[16 : 59] And if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

So we've read about Christ's care for his people, his little ones, and he shows his care most touchingly, most powerfully, most astoundingly, at the cross where he died to save his people.

So let's sing this beautiful song, When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and poor contempt on all my pride.

What the number? It's 453, When I survey the wondrous cross. When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and poor contempt on all my pride.

[18 : 54] Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, saving the cross of Christ my God, the very things that show on me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love, though mingled down, when did such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown.

His life, blood like a crimson rope, closed all his body on the tree, and I am dead to all the globe, and all the globe is dead to me.

Where the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my love, my own.

As I hand over to Julian to bring God's word, let us pray.

[21 : 27] Lord, bless our hearing of God's word. We've prayed for the speaking of it, and now we pray that as we listen, we would not be distracted, we would not be deflected, but we would hear God's word in the power of the Holy Spirit, even in this strange and different way, but nevertheless, may we be transformed by your word and by your spirit, for the glory of Jesus.

Amen. Greetings, brothers and sisters at Calvary Chapel. It really is great to be with you again, and to be sharing from God's word. What a privilege that we have, and I wish that I could actually be with you, be actually seeing you.

I have to use my imagination because we live in COVID country, but I know you, and so I can see you in my mind, and I have you in my mind, and I have you in my heart as I preach, and my hope, my prayer is that your hearts will be touched and transformed by God's word.

We're looking at Matthew chapter 18, and Matthew chapter 18, it really is one piece. It's a whole unit, a pericope, if you, so-called pericope, that's what the scholars and the theologians call it, but it's basically one unit of scriptures, and we could preach on the whole lot, but I suspect that you want to get home and have some dinner.

Well, you are at home probably, aren't you? But you want to have your dinner and things like that. So we are going to limit ourselves so that to make this manageable to verses 10 to 14. So let me just read them again. 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.

[23 : 10] What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the 99 on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?

And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the 99 that did not wander off.

In the same way, your father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. Let's begin by asking the question, because we need to be clear on this to start with.

Who are the little ones? Okay. See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones. Therefore, it's important for us to know who are these ones we're not to despise, not even one.

Okay. Who are they? Well, it basically means all the people of God, all the children of God. In verse two, well, verse one, Jesus is asked, who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

[24 : 09] And Jesus takes a little child. So a little child, this is a real child, by the way. It's not, Jesus isn't using an example. This isn't part of a parable. He actually takes a real child and puts this little child among their midst.

And a little child, this child would be maybe three, four, maybe five years old. It's a little bitty child. You know, and they're so lovely and so cute. And it takes this little child and he says, yeah, anyone that would be great in the kingdom of God must become like, like one of these.

And there he's got this little child. Everyone can see this cute little child. And Jesus is saying, you've got to be something like one of these. If you want to be great in the kingdom of God. And verse four, Jesus, therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child.

So you take the position of this child. This lowly position is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And so, and then in verse six, so it's also in those verses, what he's done is he said, you know, if anyone in the kingdom of heaven is great, if you want to be, if you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven, all those ones have had to become like a little child.

And then in verse six, he says, if anyone causes one of these little ones, and then he does something.

[25 : 35] He says, that is those who believe in me. Okay. Let me just read it again. If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me to stumble, it would be better if a millstone had been put around his neck and be thrown into the sea and all those other things that Jesus talks about.

So the little ones are believers, all believers. We mustn't lose sight of what they'd have understood and of what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is saying that the relationship between God and his children is something like the relationship between adults and little children like this one that's in their midst.

And adults tend to be like protective, don't they, of little children. And we make big allowances for little children, don't we? I mean, think about it. If you've been in a supermarket and there's some poor mother struggling with her little child, who's convulsing on the floor, having a massive tantrum. And you get those mums, okay, and those parents who've only had one child and that first child has just been a little angel. You know, and they're thinking, oh, can't she control her children?

[26 : 52] And you think, you wait, number two might not be so easy. But anyway, you get what I'm saying, right? that the relationship between, and we make allowances for these little children because they're little children, right?

And the relationship between God and his children is something like that between adults and little children like the one that Jesus has in their midst. You can perhaps think of some lovely little children in your church.

I'm sure you can. They're adorable, aren't they? I love the little children in our church. They really are just so precious, right? And that's like God and his children.

Now, we don't really like to think of ourselves as little ones, do we? I mean, it's kind of a little bit strange. It might seem a bit strange to us, but really we are like little ones to God.

He loves us something, or the way that we love our little ones is something like how God loves us. But his love is far more, far greater.

[28 : 00] Anyway, so, so there's a parallel here that is being drawn. Now we might think, well, I don't like to think of myself as a little one.

Um, I'm like, I am like a child, but I've grown up. You know, I, I'm a father. I've got four daughters, right? And they've all grown up. And I have to be careful now that they've grown up because they know that they've grown up.

They've got their own family, some of them. And I have to be careful about the limitations of my, my fatherly authority. It doesn't, it doesn't carry as far with them as it used to, as I wish it still did, if I'm telling you the truth.

But, but it doesn't. It's just the way that it is. You know, we're quite grown up now. I'm quite independent. Thank you very much, dad. They might say they don't say that, but they could say that. And it's true.

They are grown up. They are independent of me. But, but if we try and think of ourselves like that with God, then we are not getting the picture that God has given us.

[29 : 02] We're not like grown up children. Now you might say, yeah, but Julian, the Bible says that we've all got to grow and mature and press on to maturity. So we can become mature.

Well, that is true. Okay. But that does, does nothing to negate the way that God sees us as these little ones, because, you know, even when we mature, however mature we get, okay.

The Bible teaches us this, that what is maturity? It is being like Jesus. And however mature we get in this life, there's still going to be a massive gulf, massive gulf.

The most mature of us is a massive gulf. You know, when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. That's what the Bible says.

In other words, when we're taken to be of the Lord on that great day, or when he returns for us, either one, we will be changed. Time is coming when we're going to be transformed and we will be like him.

[30 : 03] And look, here's the thing, right? That transformation is going to be far more significant, far, far, far greater. It's going to absolutely dwarf any maturity that we've achieved in this life.

Then we'll be mature like our older brother, like our big brother, Jesus. Um, but any maturity we get in this life, it's not that it doesn't count because it's a wonderful thing.

God loves it, but still we are precious little children. In fact, um, we know, don't we, that the more mature we are, the more we know, we don't know much at all.

The more we rely, we know we're desperate for his wisdom. The more we're aware of our weakness and our vulnerability, um, the more desperate we are for his wisdom and knowledge. Cause we just don't know very much. It's the immature that think that they can be grown up and independent. Don't really need God. Don't really consult him much about things. Cause they've got it all worked out.

[31 : 06] The more mature, mature we are, the more needy we realize we are just like little children. And then these little children, these little ones, that's what we are, are analogized in verse 12 as sheep.

What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, will he not leave the 99 on the hill and go to look for the one that wandered off? Let's just think about firstly, the sheep.

Okay. Particularly the sheep that wanders off. Okay. That's our main focus. Let's see. This is depicts one of God's little ones.

Remember there's a little, as Jesus is teaching, he's got a little one in their midst and he's just been saying, you've got to be like this little one. And this little one, these are like sheep. And so the sheep in this analogy, these are God's little ones, the precious little ones.

Right. We mustn't lose sight of that. They're not just sheep. Right. And when one of these sheep goes astray, it's like one of God's little ones going astray, getting lost.

[32 : 19] It's a picture of one of God's people, you know, being tempted by sin, being or wandering from the flock.

You know, it's like just as the sheep wanders from the shepherd and the flock, and strays. So this is a picture of a believer that wanders from the Lord Jesus and his church.

That's what's being depicted here. And listen, right. This is really important for us to understand. That is that the wandering, the going astray, isn't necessarily geographical, at least not to begin with.

In other words, it's not that they actually wander from the church. They can be coming to the church regularly attending. And here's what happens. The heart. Goes astray, even while they're in the midst of being with brothers and sisters, maybe singing his praises still, even maybe attending prayer meals and Bible studies. The heart can go astray. Jesus quote in Isaiah says, these people on the knee with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

[33 : 35] In vain. They worship. This is, this can be a believer. He's right there, but his heart is far away. Still going through the motions.

In Proverbs chapter 23, verse 26, Solomon, who wrote most of the Proverbs and he writes this, he says, and he has in mind, he says, my son, right?

The only son that's named of Solomon in the Bible, as far as I know, is Rehoboam. He's the famous one. And we know the story, don't we, of Rehoboam, how tragic it is. He went astray, right? He really messed up.

Okay. But you can imagine as he's growing up, his father seeing those, that those tendencies of his heart to go astray. He says, my son, give me your heart.

Give me your heart. Yeah. His father loves him. And he's saying, give me your heart. Don't let your heart go after these other things. Give me your heart. And let your eyes delight in my ways.

[34 : 36] You know, as sheep, if we give our hearts to God, if our heart is in the Lord Jesus, as it were, for him, then we will also have a heart for the flock, a heart for the shepherd, a heart for the flock, a heart for Jesus, a heart for his church, a heart will be in it.

But a sheep that strays, usually first strays with their heart, not geographically, but pursuing vain idols, hearts fastened on things that really are not worthy.

That's where it starts. You know, but a great friend of mine, and mentor, a great, great godly man, guy called John Gillespie.

He said that we go to heaven in three stages. He may not have come up with this. He may have, I don't know, but I heard it from him. Okay. He said, we go to heaven in three stages. First, our treasure goes to heaven.

And then our hearts, because where your treasure, Jesus is our treasure, where your treasure is, your heart is also. And then he says this, and then finally we go, you know, last of all, we go to be with the Lord.

[35 : 56] And I think that's a helpful analogy and true, that when our hearts are fastened on something other than the Lord Jesus, we lose a heart for him and a heart for the church.

Sooner or later, we will go. And we end up like that wandering sheep that's been ravaged by wolves, caught up in thickets, in a tangle, in a mess.

This is a good argument as well, brothers and sisters, to speak, that speaks of how it's so important for us to really be a part of the church. We cannot follow the shepherd without being part of the flock.

Can we, I mean, if the whole flock's following Jesus and we're following Jesus, we're going to be a part of the flock. Can't really follow Jesus without being part of the church.

We're to be genuinely, meaningfully connected with the Lord Jesus and with one another. And we do that by, through bonds of love and bonds of love for one another, for the Lord.

[37 : 06] That's not just something we say, it's something we do. Dear children, let us love, not with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. Love is as love does.

And so this is a plea really for us to be connected, loving one another, for our hearts to be with the Lord Jesus, loving him and loving one another in action, in things that we do.

And it's a great way for us to assess ourselves. Am I actually loving my brothers and sisters? Am I just saying it? So I just talk the talk. How is it that sheep go astray so often?

Well, I think that very often what happens is believers allow their hearts first to go astray. So now their heart isn't in the church. Their hearts are with the Lord Jesus.

They like the people. They'll come along, but their hearts are elsewhere. And then they begin to become more fringe. And here's the thing.

[38 : 04] It's a very vulnerable state to be in, but people can be in that position for a long time. And they're like, I'm quite comfortable here. I'm quite safe here.

They think. And it's a delusion. It's not safe. It really is not safe. It's where we're weak.

And we will find that, you know, at the wrong time, the wrong temptation comes along and it's devastating. And then we regret.

We come limping back to the Lord. And we just wish. Why didn't I? I wish my heart was with God all along. Cut out the heartache. It's not a safe place.

If you've been on the fringes and you've been allowed your heart, you love other things. Your heart is fastened on vain idols. And you think you've been doing all right like that. Listen, know this.

[39 : 02] That is the grace of God giving you time. Don't abuse or take for granted that grace. Turn back to the Lord now. Really?

Well, that's the sheep that go astray. What about the shepherd? The shepherd goes after the sheep. Why? Because he is not willing for any of these pressures.

And here he reverts back to the images, images, images of small children. He is not willing that any of these little ones perish.

These little ones. He's been talking about sheep. He's back to the little ones, right? He's not willing that any of them perish. And he reminds us that these sheep, they're his little ones, right? He goes after them. He's not willing.

He's not. He can't entertain the idea of them even going astray. He can't. He will not. He, and so he will go after them.

[39 : 58] He's not willing. To leave them. He's like a protective parent. Okay? If you want to upset a parent, just hurt their children, right? You'll see, right?

How protective parents can be. We all know this, don't we? Even in the animal kingdom, you see how a lioness or a lion will protect their cubs, or a vixen will protect her cubs.

Are they cubs? Little baby foxes? Whatever they are. I think they're cubs. Anyway, you know, it's not surprising that God goes after them, because they are his little ones.

And, I mean, think about it like this.

If you've got, imagine you've got like five children, and you're, you're, you're father. You've got five children. You've got one on the way. Your wife's heavily pregnant.

[41 : 04] Can we have another child soon? So there you are. You're all out as a family. You've got your little ones with you, your little tribal following behind. And you look around, you're in a busy market.

And one of them is gone. The second youngest. I mean, maybe you've got little children. Imagine that little one's gone. Now, I've had this experience once with my wife, George, who was in Asda once. And we lost our poor little Jade.

And Jade, she was like a little scared kid. You know, she was very little and very scared of everything. And like, honestly, oh, the feeling, right? When you, when you lose one of your little ones, it is, it is horrific.

It really is. You, you just got to find them. And that is how I felt. It's like, where is she? And suddenly it's like high alert, looking all over the shop. And then I heard over the tannoy, would the parents of Jade, please come to the tannoy.

Like humiliate because you're the neglectful parents. but, but listen, the moment that sound comes over the tannoy, the relief, my little girl, man, she's, I mean, the stuff that's going through your mind, when they're not, when you've lost them just for those moments, horrible feeling.

[42 : 11] I'm sure some of you have had that feeling. And anyone that's never had that experience and is sitting there smugly thinking, what terrible parents, just remember it was two days before Jesus' parents realized that Jesus was missing.

So let's not judge me too harshly, please. I'm sure you wasn't. But, but getting back to this little illustration that I'm giving five children, second one's gone missing.

That is a horrific thing, right? You would not say, well, Oh no, you know, everyone's like looking around, but where is he? Oh no, it's really discouraging that he's gone.

But you know, we've got another one on the way. So we got four, we got all these other four. We still have five when this one's born. And yeah, it is a real disappointment, but there's others. You wouldn't do that.

Would you? You, you would be looking for your little ones because they're precious and vulnerable. And that is God's children to him. So it shouldn't surprise us that the shepherd goes after that one sheep.

[43 : 11] And then when he finds the sheep, what does it say? And if he finds it, truly, I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the 99 that did not wander off.

And in the same way, your head father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. He's happier about finding that one than the 99 that didn't wander off. It's kind of like saying that all of us singing and praise at church on a Sunday morning, if you can imagine, remember gathering like we used to, all of that, it doesn't bring him as much joy as that one unworthy, foolish, ungrateful sinner coming back to God.

That brings God more joy than all of our worshiping together. And all that business. Now that might, you might think, why? Maybe you can think of a sinner and they'd come back and they've gone off again and come back and, what?

You know, I've been faithful. And if you're kind of, you know, you've heard stuff, people speak of this, you might be thinking of Tim Keller, the older brother syndrome.

And I think it could be a bit of that, but, you know, Jehovah's Witnesses, right? If you're a Jehovah's Witness and you've wandered away, you've gone off into the world, and then you want to come back, here's what you have to do, right?

[44 : 43] You want to come back to the Kingdom Hall, Jehovah's Witnesses, they will have you back, they will. But what you have to do is you have to sit, when you first start attending again, when they let you start attending again, you have to sit at the back of the hall, and you're not allowed to speak to anyone, and no one's allowed to speak to you, for two years.

And then after the two years, you're fully admitted into the congregation, when they know that you're really serious about this. And that is the opposite.

You know, we might be, tend to be, oh yeah, that's a bit harsh, but, you know, you've got something there, you know, when these people come back, they mess up, you should, you know, they shouldn't just be welcomed right in, and who are about it.

But, you know, that one, as he sits at the back, he's the sort of shameful one. But he will be accepted, because they're going to be gracious, right? But it's the opposite here.

God is so happy about this one. Welcomes him in, back to the flock. Well, why?

[45 : 53] Well, there's two things, two perspectives on this, that I think help us understand. The first is this, imagine, let's just come back to, that illustration of a parent, losing one of their five children.

Yeah, the reality is, if that child's not found soon, it's devastating on the family. You imagine the family, sitting around the dinner table, with their four children, there's one place empty.

You know, those parents, they can't rest. They can have no peace. And, no matter what the children do, to try and make them feel better, and they may be genuinely good, and doing a good job, but, but, those parents, cannot, have joy, even with the children they've got.

Now, imagine, that one of those, the remaining children, is out, while the parents are at the table, and they come back, and they've found, the lost child.

It's like, overwhelming joy, relief. You can imagine the tears of joy. Never going to let this child go again. And I think it's, that, something like that, that Jesus is talking about.

[47 : 14] But, I think there's more to it than that. And we'll see, in a minute, why that is. As we look at this next part, how does the shepherd, go after the wandering sheep?

I know we're not, doesn't tell us, is it? Just as he goes after the sheep, and if he finds it, he brings, he's, he's happy. Okay. But how, how does he, how does the shepherd, bring back the sheep?

Well, we know, don't we, what the will, of God is. He is not the, shepherd is not willing, that any of these little ones, go astray.

He's not willing, that any of these little ones perish. So his will, the will of the shepherd, the will of God, for these little ones, his will is that they come back.

His will is that they're restored fully. That is his will. And this brothers and sisters, is where church discipline comes in.

[48 : 11] Look at the next verse. If your brother or sister go, sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. And if they listen to you, you have won them over.

In other words, if you see them sinning, they're drifting off, they're going away, and you bring them back, you've won them. How does the shepherd bring back their sheep? Well, how does Jesus, the head of the body, bring back his sheep?

Through his body, through his people. And look at the picture, that we're given here. If they do not listen, take one or two others along with you, so every matter may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

So, so if they don't respond, well, you go and get, you take one of your mates, you know, one of the brothers and sisters, a mature and godly person, and, and the two of you try and get this sinner to repent, this brother, because they're precious.

You try and get them to come back. This is how the shepherd, this is, see, when we do that, we are doing the will of the father. His will is that none of them should be left to perish.

[49 : 20] His will is that they come back, and we do his will when we go and say, brother, come back, stop, you repent. We're doing his will.

And, and when we do that, when we go, we bring and bring back the lost sheep.

We bring the Lord great joy and happiness. Listen, just to help us understand this, because here's the, here's how the, what we're told.

If the one or two, if the brother doesn't respond or the sister doesn't respond to the one or two that have tried to persuade them to repent and come back, says, if they still refuse to listen, verse 17, tell it to the church.

And then what does it say? If they refuse to listen, even to the church, in other words, you tell it to the church, and then the whole church goes after the brother.

[50 : 27] They're all saying, come back. And if he refuses to listen to the church, that's what it says. So the church has been doing that. Then you treat them as you're a pagan or a tax collector.

So the whole church, you see, it takes the whole church to express the urgency and the love of God for the little one that's going astray. So important is the little one.

The whole church is involved in the church. Listen, a great picture of this is when a tragedy happened here in Morscombe.

I'm speaking to you from St. George's Hall. This place was built, this community center was built, because of a tragedy that happened here in Morscombe in 1986.

Nicola Fellows and Karen Hadaway were abducted. And sadly, they were terribly murdered. Really tragic story.

[51 : 23] but listen, when those girls first went missing, it's like, there's a point where mum and dad realized, where's Nicola? But where's, this Karen should be back by now.

I'm giving her a few more minutes. Time starts ticking by. They start to get really worried. I'm going to go and look for her. They're looking down the street.

They call it the friends houses. You see, this is like the one that goes after the person who's sinning. Go and point out their sin. Just go off and go and find them.

That's what they're doing. First, first step is one person, one or two, and then they can't find them.

And then what happened is those parents, before you knew it, there's a number of people from the nape of their friends, joined them in looking for their children.

Why? Because they were all concerned. for the children. And very sadly, you know, there was a report to the police because their children didn't turn up.

[52 : 25] And hours turned to days. And within days, the whole community, all the police, people from all around, volunteers just joined.

And a massive search was on for those little girls. Why these? Because they were little ones, and they were precious. And everybody knew it.

And everybody joined in the search. And it seems to me that that's what church discipline is about, really. That we recognize these are precious to God.

And we identify with God and they should be precious to us. Listen, Jesus wasn't so bothered about the nine times. The nine times, what were they doing? The nine to nine sheep. They weren't out looking.

They weren't looking. You know, they didn't care so much. God's heart is to bring back the lost and the wounded, the rebellious and the foolish to the safety of the fold and back to the shepherd.

[53 : 30] And when we reach out to our brothers and sisters, we do his will. And, and, and, and, you know, it's a very sad thing.

Those little girls, when they were found, they were found dead. That's a tragic end. But, you know, when we bring back a sinner, God is overjoyed.

And we should all be overjoyed. Never mind that he's happy about that, that one who returned

them. We shouldn't be like, oh, disgruntled world. We're here all the time. No, it's our joy. If we love the father, we love his children too.

And so, so that's what's happening in this passage.

And we've got as far as we can get. I've just got to bring a few applications now. And I'm going to be as quick as I can with these because our time has run away. Firstly, here's the gotcha part of the verse of the passage.

[54 : 32] Verse 10, see that you do not despise any of these little ones, you know, and he's talking about the ones that have gone astray. To despise them is to be indifferent towards them.

To despise them is to know that the father is aching for them. And we're quite happy to just carry on singing. Now, you know, without pursuing them. Do not despise.

They've sinned. They're sinners. They're people that have wandered off. They're rebellious and foolish. They're ungrateful. And it's difficult, isn't it? Sometimes to love those ones, but we must remember that they are the little ones.

Just like we are. Well, here's some applications from all this. Firstly, there are no big shots in the church. We're all little ones. Yeah. In an age of celebrity pastors and all that business.

Yeah. We might esteem and hail certain pastors. Look, there are no big shots in the kingdom of God. We're just little ones. We never rise above that.

[55 : 35] And, and I want to encourage us just to be content, to be little ones. This little ones of God. It's a wonderful thing. Okay.

Sometimes we want to be big shots because we want to be valued, which brings us to the second application. As little, as little ones, we are precious to God.

You know, it's because we're his little ones. It says, you know, that their angels, Jesus says, their angels always see the face of my father in heaven. And I don't know exactly what that means, but I know that it means this.

It's saying something about these little ones. Their angels are always before the father on their behalf. I don't know exactly what it means, but it speaks of the preciousness, the value of the little ones and God's concern for them.

He's watching over them. You know, we may be little ones. You, we're all little ones, but we are treasured. We are treasured.

[56 : 38] We're treasured. Apart from anything else, because Jesus paid a tremendous price for us.

All the gold and the silver in the world was not enough. All the precious stones amassed together. It wasn't enough to buy one of these precious little ones. It wasn't enough to buy me.

And it wasn't enough to buy you for our redemption. Only the blood of Jesus would suffice. And God paid that price. We're precious.

And it's because we're so precious that the heart of God is not willing that anyone should perish. That's why he sends us after them to fulfill his heart.

And bring them back. It's like, I've paid for them. God would say, I've paid, they're mine. I've paid for them. Go and, you love me. Go and get them. Come on. They're important to me.

[57 : 39] And they should be important to you as well. And when we pursue these precious little ones, we bring great joy to our Father when we pursue them.

And we should join the celebration when one sinner comes back to the Lord. Is there someone that maybe you just let them drift?

You didn't pursue them. But you need to pick up the phone. You need to start praying for them again. You let them go.

The Father, he wouldn't, but you did. Maybe God would have you. Pursue them again. Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God.

That's what this is about. It's about loving one another because God loves us. Well, it's not the best application in the world, but our time is up.

[58 : 54] And I trust that this has encouraged you to value one another and even the undeserving, rebellious, foolish ones that that could be us when we wander off to pursue one another and to bring one another back.

Amen. So thank you, Julian, again, for bringing God's word to us. We're so grateful for your support and help. And we pray that the Lord will bless you and your family and your church as you serve the Lord in the place where he's put you.

Praise the Lord, O my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

He forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases and redeems your life from the pit. Praise my soul, the King of heaven, who like you, his praise should sing, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me, his praise should sing.

So that's a great song to close with, isn't it? Remembering how we've been ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, and may that spill over in a very deep way into the way we relate to one another and into the sort of community that God is building.

[60 : 20] So we're going to sing this 103b is the number and praise my soul, the King of heaven. Praise my soul, the King of heaven, to his feet, your tribute bring, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me, his praise should sing.

Praise him, praise him, praise him, praise him, praise the everlasting King. praise him, praise him for his grace and favor, to our fathers in distress.

Praise him still the same forever, slow to anger, swift to bless.

Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, glorious in His faithfulness.

For the night He tends and screams us, where our human faith He comes.

[62 : 12] In His hands He gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.

Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, Oidly as His mercy flows.

Hail as summer's flowery flourish, blows the wind and it is gone.

But while foreigners rise and perish, God endures unchanging on. Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise the High Eternal One.

Angels help us to adore Him.

[63 : 24] You behold Him face to face. Sun and moon bow down before Him, all who dwell in time and space.

Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise with us the God of grace.

And let's close with this prayer.

To Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore.

Amen. Amen. So, it's bye-bye from me just now, and God bless you, and we hope to see everyone soon.

[64 : 37] Bye-bye. Bye-bye.