

For the One that Went Astray

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 October 2023

Preacher: Dr. Wes Feltner

[0 : 00] All right, if you've got your Bible, go to Luke chapter 15.

You may also turn in your Bibles to Matthew 18. I'm not preaching two sermons, but I am looking at two different passages tonight. We'll be reading in a moment Luke 15, so make sure you go there, but maybe just kind of place your finger in Matthew 18 as we'll go there in just a moment.

We're starting a brand new series this weekend that I'm excited about. Of course, I'm always excited about every new series, but this is called For the One, For the One. And I kind of have two questions I want to ask first is, what's this series about?

And then secondly, why am I preaching this series? First of all, what this series is going to look at over the next several weeks is we're going to look specifically at how Jesus is for the one.

He's for the one. What I mean is he's for the one that went astray. He's for the one that no one else wants. He's for the one that everyone else overlooks.

[1 : 17] He's for the one that has been despised and rejected. What we see if we take a really close look at the ministry of Jesus is he is for the one.

He's for that outcast, the rejected, the one that everyone says there's no way they could ever enter the kingdom of God. And that is exactly what happens.

They experience the grace of God and enter his kingdom. So we're going to look at it. And this is one of the most exciting things for me to teach on because it really gets to the heart of our ministry here, which is the second question is, why am I preaching this?

We're coming off a series over the last three weeks that we just called Vision. And we looked at the vision of our church and we looked at the structure of our ministries and things like that.

And so we're doing this series because this gets to the culture that we fight so hard for to maintain and cultivate here at Faith Family.

[2 : 20] Listen, we want to be a church for the one, for the one that's hurting, for the one that's broken, for the one that needs hope, for the one that has nowhere else to go.

We want to be a church that is intentional about ministering to that one and caring for them the way Jesus cared for the one. Amen. So listen, this gets, and I can't wait to unpack this over the next few weeks and just show you how in Jesus's ministry and hopefully in ours that we will be for the one.

Well, this really finds its basis in Luke 15 and in Matthew 18. So if you're able to stand, please do so as we honor the reading of God's word. And tonight we focus on Luke 15, one through seven.

You know this story. This is familiar to you. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. And so he told him a parable.

[3 : 31] What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he's lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulder rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors saying to them, rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

I love Jesus. Did you just read that? You're like, Jesus, thank you for those powerful words. Let's pray and ask God to teach us from them tonight.

So Lord, thank you for this time tonight to study your word. Thank you for this precious passage to be able to look at. God, it reveals your heart. It reveals the kingdom and I pray it as a foundation of what we're all about here at Faith Family.

[4 : 45] So help us this evening, understand your word and renew our passion for the one. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. You can be seated.

You can be seated. Have you ever had someone do something nice for you and afterwards you really wish they hadn't? You ever had that experience where you're like, thanks, but no thanks. That's exactly what happened with a woman by the name of Annette.

She was an Israeli woman who lived in Tel Aviv and she decided that she was going to surprise her elderly mother with a gift. Her mother was the kind of individual that liked to hold on to everything. She was kind of a hoarder and she'd been sleeping on this old mattress, this kind of tattered bed for decades. And so Annette thought, I've got a great idea.

I'm going to get mom a brand new bed. And so she waited for her mother to be gone for a few days and she got up early one Sunday morning and she went down to the store and she found a really great deal on a brand new mattress.

[5 : 46] She spent the rest of that Sunday lugging that new mattress up into her mother's room and getting it ready and taking the old mattress and throwing it into the dumpster. And then just getting everything set up perfect for her mother to return.

In fact, Annette said that when she fell asleep that night, she was exhausted but yet excited to surprise her mother the next day.

Well, the next day when her mother arrived home and saw what her daughter had done, she wasn't really happy. And it wasn't because she didn't like the new mattress.

It wasn't because she didn't appreciate the kindness of her daughter. It was just the fact that inside that old mattress was a million dollars in cash. Exactly, right?

And so she was unbelievably shocked by this and her entire life savings that she'd been storing away was now gone.

[6 : 45] When her daughter heard this, she ran downstairs as fast as she could. She checked the dumpster and sure enough, they had already taken the mattress away. They notified the two major dump sites in Tel Aviv and listen, for the next several days, many people searched through, picture this, tons and tons and tons of garbage trying to find that mattress that was lost.

Can you imagine? No, seriously, can you imagine losing a million dollars in cash that way? Some of you are like, I can't even imagine a million dollars in cash, much less losing it from a mattress. And if that happened to you, you would respond the exact same way. You would be out there searching day and night until you found what was lost.

Listen, that's the natural response for people that lose something that's important to them. You know this. If you lose a kid, you panic and you search and you look everywhere to try to find your kid.

If you lose your car, you call the police to try to help them retrieve it and find it. If you lose your cell phone or some of you, even your car keys, you'll turn over the entire home just trying to find your phone.

[8 : 06] Maybe you lose your dog. You'll put up posters and walk through neighborhoods all night long to try to find your dog. If you lose your cat, you keep watching TV and hope maybe it'll eventually show up.

But you know how this works. It works like this. And you know this. We search for what is significant. Right? We search for what is significant.

And the opposite is true. That is, people won't look two seconds for things they don't care about. How many of you would spend hours searching for a penny?

None of you. How many of you would spend days searching for an old pair of socks? Now, there are some men in the room that would probably be like, I'd probably search a few days for my old pair of socks.

But of course not. These are things that aren't that important because, again, we search for what? Say it. Significant. We search for what is significant.

[9 : 04] That is what's so shocking and unusual about this parable, this story that Jesus tells. And he tells it in two places. Here in Luke 15 and in Matthew 18 as well.

Let me first describe the context that's going on here because listen to me, listen to me. If you're going to try to understand a parable of Jesus, you must always, this is the number one mistake people make in trying to understand the parables of Jesus, is you have to know the context that parable comes out of.

Most people just take the story and they try to unpack the story without understanding the context it comes from. And there's two different contexts, though they are similar, in which Jesus tells this parable of the lost sheep.

Here's the first context. It happens in Matthew 18 and verse 1. Notice this verse. And at that time, the disciples came to Jesus saying, and I want everybody to say this question with me, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

So that's the question the disciples are asking. As they've heard Jesus teach about the kingdom, these num-nums have been consumed with personal rank.

[10:19] They're asking, who's the greatest? Who gets shotgun? Who gets the best seat at the table? Who gets the biggest crown, the largest mansion, the fanciest robe? And Jesus, realizing that his disciples don't get it.

They just don't get it. And I'm afraid that even after years of us talking about this and preaching this, we still don't get it. And so Jesus is like, I'm going to teach you a lesson.

And he brings over a child. Look at verse 2. In other words, Jesus says, listen, you've been following me, you've been listening to me, and you've been listening to me talk about this child. This child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, Jesus says, listen, you've been following me, and you've been listening to me talk about the kingdom, and you still don't get it. Look at this child. Unless you become like him, unless you become like her, you don't get in. Now, the misunderstanding of what this is is to understand children in the context of the ancient Near East.

[11:35] Jesus is not suggesting that children are humble in their behavior. Have you ever been around a children? They are not humble in their behavior at all.

They steal toys. They want their own way. They cry and fuss. That ain't what Jesus is talking about here. He's talking about how in the ancient Near East, listen, children had no rights.

Children had no privileges. Children did not have any status whatsoever in the ancient Near Eastern society. And so what Jesus is saying, he tells this whole parable out of the context of the disciples not understanding what it means to be the greatest in the kingdom.

And Jesus is saying that if you want to learn what the kingdom of God is really about, you have to lose your status. You've got to lose your rights. Stop caring about being great.

Because it isn't about you being great. It's about you being humble. Because it's in your humility like this child who realizes they don't have any rights or privileges or status that you actually find greatness.

[12:48] Are you with me? That's the first context. Here's the second context. It's out of Luke. Look at Luke chapter 15 verse 1. I love this. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

And of course the Pharisees and the scribes, the religious leaders, grumbled saying, Ooh! This man, can you believe it?

Receives sinners. And he not only receives them, he eats with them. Disgusting. Now listen, this question here is not who is the greatest in the kingdom.

The question going on here is who should even be in it all? Who should get the kingdom? Here's what's going down here. And this is what we're going to do over the next few weeks is really take an honest look at who got the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus.

And as Jesus has been doing ministry, he's been gathering this following. And the following is being made up by people like this. It's social outcasts, that is the poor.

[13:54] It's sexual outcasts, that's the prostitute. It's the political outcasts, that is the tax collector. And these are the people that the Pharisees would look down their righteous noses on.

This group following Jesus, to coin a phrase, would be like a basket of deplorables. You'll get that political joke later, right? These were people easily dismissed, certainly dismissed by the Pharisees, because they valued the blessed and they overlooked the broken.

They celebrated the attractive and they ignored the alone. They elevated the religious people and they devalued the rejected. And Jesus is going to say to the disciples, or say to the Pharisees, what he said to the disciples.

Are you listening? You don't get it. You don't get it. You've missed the entire point of the kingdom of God. So question one in the first context is who's the greatest.

Question two is who should be in the kingdom. And out of both of these contexts, Jesus tells the same story. Look at Matthew 18, verse 12.

[15:00] Here it is. What do you think if a man has a hundred sheep? And how many? One. You can do better. How many? One. One of them, just one of them has gone astray.

Does he not leave the 99 in the mountains and go search for the how many? The one that went astray. This is the story. It's a very, very short and simple parable about the lost sheep.

Now, we need to understand sheep to understand this parable because when we think of sheep, we tend to think like a cute little cuddly, sweet, precious animal. This is not a sheep in the ancient Near East at all.

There are at least four things to understand about this sheep, which we'll understand about our lives as well. And that is, first of all, you know this, sheep are dumb. Sheep are not very intelligent creatures, right?

Have you ever seen one fetch? No, you throw a stick and they just kind of stand there and bad. They don't go after it and bring it back to you. In my personal and theological opinion, sheep are about as worthless as cats.

[16:07] They don't do anything. Come on, that's just true. That's just true. Cats just sit there and they don't do anything at all. They don't fetch. They don't play. They just sit there arrogantly and purr.

Well, that's kind of like a sheep. They just sit there. They don't do anything. They have no idea where they're going and they're constantly losing their way. Now, they think they're smart.

They think they're intelligent, which is why they wander off. Hey, I got this. I can figure this out. This landscape's not too difficult. Oh, and I can climb that mountain. And they usually end up deceived by their own stupidity.

Secondly is they lack discernment. They lack discernment. Sheep are led by their appetites. In other words, all they have to do is see a patch of green grass and it doesn't matter how far away it is.

It doesn't matter how dangerous the road to get there. They will go after that no matter what and they end up getting lost. And they do this over and over and over and over again.

[17:08] Thirdly, they're defenseless. That is, sheep are an easy meal. They don't put up much of a fight. If you have ever watched an episode of The Animal Planet that involved a sheep and a wolf, I assure you it didn't go well for the sheep.

Sheep never win that match. It's why, by the way, you never see a sports team that has its mascot, the sheep. I can't think of one. We're playing the fighting sheep.

Like it's not intimidating, amen? In fact, it's almost as intimidating as this, right? I mean, I'm just being honest. Like gopher, really? Really, a gopher's not that intimidating.

We're playing the gophers. Now lions or tigers or bears, that's intimidating, but sheep, not so much. In fact, sheep are so non-threatening and you tell your children and grandchildren to count them at night in order to go to sleep. You don't do that with wolves. You're not like, little Johnny, just count wolves until you go to sleep.

[18:07] No, that'd be like counseling later in therapy. No, you tell them to count sheep because they're defenseless. They don't fight. They're not intimidating. And lastly, because of these other things, that is that they're dumb and they lack discernment and they're defenseless, they're always in danger.

This is why the sheep or a sheep needs 24-7 protection. By who? The shepherd. Without the shepherd, the sheep is in great, great, great danger.

Now that's a biblical description, an accurate description of this lost sheep. And guess who the Bible compares you to?

And me as well. Isaiah 53, verse six. All we like, say it, sheep have gone astray. It almost sounded like a bah when you said that, right?

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. Any sheep here today? Okay. Anybody made a mess of your life, gone your own way, wandered from God, driven by your appetites, ended up going down a path you didn't want to go.

[19:24] You've wandered in and out of church or in and out of relationships. Your spiritual life is up and down. You're always searching for that patch of green grass because if you could just get that, then you'd be satisfied.

The truth is, every single one of us are the sheep that went astray. Now, the question is this. Are you with me? What do you do with people like that? What do you do with the sheep that wandered off?

Now, don't lose the biblical math of the parable. Listen, listen, listen. It's not like you've got one sheep and that one sheep wanders off. No, no, no. You have how many?

How many? How many? Tennessee math. 99 plus one is? 100. I didn't eat my toes for that. 99 and one's 100. I got 100 sheep and only how many has wandered off?

[20 : 23] One. Only one. Meaning, I've got 99 well-behaved sheep. I've got 99 attractive sheep. I've got 99 respectable sheep.

I've got 99 religious sheep. I've got 99 sheep who have it all together. The question is, what do you do with one? What do you do with the one who keeps going astray?

Well, you get rid of it. You fire them. You put them in the back seat. Whatever you do, you don't search for it. Maybe you search for it for a few minutes, but you don't go to great effort to try to find one when you've already got 99.

You see, let me put this back in the context here. Listen, the Pharisees would say this, sheep like that one don't belong in the kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus, you shouldn't be eating with them. You shouldn't be receiving them. And the disciples would say, that one sheep, you know, the kind of sheep that wanders off, that goes astray, that one sheep might get in God's kingdom, but they'll never be the greatest like me.

[21 : 37] They won't get the front row seat like I'm going to get in the kingdom of God. And so, it's interesting that that is not the response of the shepherd.

The Pharisees would say, we don't need sheep like that. And the disciples would say, sheep like that might be included, but they're way down the list of importance.

But notice how the shepherd responds, verse 12 of chapter 18. What do you think if a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, he's not leave the 99 mountains and go in search for the one that went astray.

Look here at the loving shepherd. The loving shepherd. In other words, the shepherd doesn't cut his losses. The shepherd doesn't say, you know, I've got 99. The shepherd doesn't say, you know, that stupid sheep, I wish you were like the other 99.

No, this shepherd leaves the 99 and goes after the one and throws it on its shoulder and returns home to a celebration and a party.

[23 : 01] And listen to me. Jesus says that's what the kingdom of God is like. There is more rejoicing in heaven over the one than there is the 99.

That turns everything on its head. Amen? Because this is not how it works in our culture. We don't care about the 1%. Are you kidding me? In politics, we would gladly take a 99% vote.

In school, we would gladly take a 99% test score unless you're like a serious nerd and you just have to have a 100. I'd take a 99. Amen? Anybody with me? We would, in a sports event, we would take a 99% winning record.

In other words, why is the shepherd so willing to leave the 99 and care about the 1? Let's go back to what we established. It's this. We search for what is significant.

We search for what is significant. Here's the point. Somebody just say preach, preacher. The 1 may not matter to the religious Pharisees and the 1 may not matter to the righteous disciples and the 1 may not even matter to the 99 but the 1 matters to the shepherd.

[24 : 28] The church may not care about you. American society may not care about you. Your family may have disowned you but Jesus is for the 1.

He will do whatever he has to do to search and rescue to find that 1. He'll go anywhere. He'll search for however long he needs to.

This again faith family is not the American church sadly. It is not even American society. It's not how locker rooms politics and families work but it is the kingdom of God.

The lesson here and the vision here and I hope we catch it is this. All you see is a child with no rights. All you see Pharisees is a prostitute and a tax collector who ought to be kicked out of town. All you see church is a divorce is an addiction is a repeat offender is a failure is an outcast and the whole point is that is exactly the kind of people that Jesus left the glories of heaven to search and rescue.

[25 : 44] and if you do not see that you do not see the kingdom of God. Jesus is for the one.

In fact look again at just how far this shepherd is willing to go. Luke 15 verse 4 what man of you having a hundred sheep if he's lost one of them does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost what's the last phrase say it with me until he finds it. In other words this shepherd is not just going to look for a few hours he's not just going to look for a few days and stop he's going to do whatever it takes to bring you home. He'll even lay down his life for you to bring you home. This is the kingdom of God. This is our good shepherd. So what does this teach us and then we'll close. A few things we should learn from this passage. First is the heart of humanity. We should learn something about ourselves. [26 : 53] Namely it's what we just sang about a few moments ago that we are prone to wander. The danger here is this the danger is this is that we are more like the disciples and more like the Pharisees than we are that one sheep.

We tend to think of ourselves as part of the 99. I'm not the best sheep of the herd or the flock but I'm good enough. I'm certainly not like that one that wandered off. I'm better than him. I'm better than her and you kind of sound like the disciples saying do I qualify for the greatest? Like have I done enough to get an award when I get to heaven? And Jesus is saying to you what he said to his disciples then is you don't get it. Until you realize you are lost you will never be found. Until you realize you you're not in the 99. you are the one every single time and that's good news because it's the one that gets the grace of the shepherd and gets brought home. [28 : 04] Listen can we just acknowledge tonight that we like sheep have all gone astray that we are that one? Second is the heart of ministry. The heart of ministry.

the disciples are so consumed with their self that they're missing the opportunity to serve. See here's the beautiful thing. Notice this on the screen. Jesus doesn't want you to be the greatest. He wants you to serve the least. He is not concerned with your righteous resume. He doesn't give a hoot because it's not enough anyways.

The only righteous resume that gets you in the kingdom of heaven is his not yours. And so here's an idea. How about you stop being consumed with developing a righteous resume so that you can qualify for the greatest and how about you just serve the least? How about you be like your shepherd and search and seek after the rejected and the lonely and the broken and those that have been the outcast and love them the way Jesus loved you? [29 : 13] I don't know. That might be what ministry is supposed to be. Not an opportunity to walk to go up the ladder but an opportunity to serve those at the bottom.

Heaven rejoices not when religious people keep the rules. He rejoices when sinners find grace. And that is why as you know I am sick and tired of the religious church. Because the religious church likes to focus on the 99. A kingdom driven church will focus on the one and go after that one until they come home.

That's ministry. Number three is this, the heart of the gospel. The heart of the gospel. How did that one sheep find rescue? Well you know it from the story right?

Do you remember when Jesus talked about that sheep took a college class, got smart, and figured his own way home? You remember that in the story? When the sheep found its own way home?

[30 : 17] Of course not. That's ridiculous. Or how about when that sheep got stronger and fought his way back? No. How does the sheep get home? He's found by the shepherd.

And only by the work of the shepherd. You see, here's the difference between religion and the gospel. Religion says find your way home.

The gospel says Jesus will carry you home. You can't get home. You're not smart enough to get home. You're not strong enough to get home. You can't work your way into the kingdom of God. The only way you get into the kingdom of God is Jesus takes you. He's the way. He's the truth. He's the life. And no one goes to the Father except how?

Through him. Him. Don't you see this is what the gospel is all about. We are not dogs in need of a better trainer. We are sheep in need of a shepherd.

[31 : 19] In need of a shepherd. That's the heart of the gospel. And then lastly, we see the heart of God. We see the heart of God in this story. Why would Jesus search like this? And this is where I want it to get personal, right?

Because we've already acknowledged that you and I, we are that one sheep. We're not the 99. We're the one. And if we acknowledge that we're the one, then it also means this.

Listen, God has a personal love for you. He cared so much and cares so much about the one that is you, that he came to rescue you.

You know how far I've wandered, you know how many dumb things I've done? I get it. I get it. But notice this here on the screen. To those of you that feel impossibly lost, Jesus says you are infinitely loved.

This is the heart of our God. He personally loves you. Some of you may remember the story of Artem.

[32 : 31] Artem was a young boy that boarded a plane one day and realized something terrifying, that he was alone. Do you remember what happened? His mother, who had adopted him and then began to realize that he had some behavior problems and some psychiatric issues, she decided that she would return him.

and so she boarded him on a plane with a note that was pinned inside his jacket that said, quote, I no longer want to parent this child.

When they interviewed his adopted mother's mother, so his grandmother, this is what his mother's mom said, quote, Tori wanted a little boy she could love, but Artem wasn't the one.

He was like a pair of pants that didn't fit. Faith family, what do you do with the one that doesn't fit? The one no one wants. The one like a sheep that's gone astray. I don't know what you would do with the one, but I'll tell you what Jesus will do.

[33 : 53] He'll eat with you. He'll receive you like a child. And like a sheep, he will search for you until you are found.

And that's because Jesus knows exactly what it's like to be rejected. He knows exactly what it's like to not fit in. He knows exactly what it's like to be all alone.

And because he became that lost sheep, I hope you're listening to me tonight. No matter how far you've wandered, know this, you have a shepherd ready to welcome you home.

That's the kingdom of God. Let's pray. Let's pray together. God, thank you for this passage tonight for us to study. It really needs to be paradigm changing in the way we think about what really matters and who really matters.

We are living in a culture so obsessed with rank and status and how many followers I have on Twitter and Facebook and what's my status and how impressive is my resume.

[35 : 12] And Jesus, what you're saying to us tonight is, listen, that may look great to the world, but it isn't the kingdom. The kingdom of God is for the one.

It's for the one who's applied over and over and over again and been rejected every time. It's for the one who's been told over and over and over again by their family, you don't matter.

It's for the one who's been told by their friends, I don't want to be your friend anymore. And it's for the one who through unwise decisions and stupid mistakes and trusting in their own logic have wandered astray.

Jesus, thank you that you're for that one. You love that one. You go after that one and you'll do whatever it takes to see them found.

So I pray tonight as we enter into a time of communion that we would be reminded that we are that one for it was our sin that nailed you to the cross.

[36 : 33] that we like sheep have gone astray and it was in our going astray that the shepherd died and took our sin. So help us reflect on the beauty of your love that though we are prone to wonder, God, you are always ready to receive.

So help us now as we reflect and think on the good news of the gospel in communion. Lord, meet us here. Talk to us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.