

St. Paul's Dorking Sermon Notes 15th August 2010

Creature Comforts – The Sheep

The Parable of the Lost Sheep – Luke 15:1-7

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Being lost

There are different ways of being lost. We can be physically lost and unable to find our way back to familiar territory and we can be mentally lost. We can be afraid when we are lost or blissfully unaware of the fact. Even when we have prepared ourselves we can still lose our way.

The Lost Sheep

Sheep are the most mentioned animal in the bible with around 500 references. Sheep played a large part in the economy of the area in which the Israelite and Jewish communities lived so the images were easy to understand. The value of a sheep would have been easy to recognize and Jesus invites his listeners to put themselves in the position of having a hundred sheep and to consider what they would do if one became lost. To make the point clearer still there follows the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost son.

Jesus is speaking to two distinct audiences: the tax collectors and “sinners” who are gathered around him to hear him; and the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were also near enough to hear but who were muttering about the fact Jesus would associate with the sinners. The parable gives a clear message to both groups as to the response that is required.

99 loose sheep in the open country – surely a recipe for disaster?

At first glance it seems that the owner has taken a huge risk leaving the whole flock while he searches for the missing sheep but it is because he knows they feel secure in that place, that it is the place they wish to be and therefore they have no reason to leave. God's love for us is such that it does not force us to stay but allows us to choose to stay because it feels right. If we wander away and become lost God will search for us and, if we let him, he will carry us back. It is not only the flock that is important but each individual member of the flock.

Our response

Can we see someone who God is searching for right now? Do we know someone who has been following the wrong guide and has ended up in a place they did not wish to be? Is there someone who has been having a great time but deep down knows they aren't really in the right place? Has someone with all the right information let the busyness of life cause them to drift away from the security of the flock? If so, we need to encourage them to see that God is looking for them and wants to carry them back on his shoulders and when that happens, we must rejoice with those in heaven.



Witness: questions to discuss

Before discussion, read the Bible passage and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer, worship and ministry.

1. What do you care enough about to go and look for? In today's throw away society it is easy to think that things are replaceable. If we were to re-write the parable is there something that might catch people's attention as the lost sheep was able?
2. Is it possible to be lost and genuinely not know? Looking back over your own life can you think of a time when you have been lost or apart from God and not known it? If so, how did it feel when you realized what had happened? Did you know that God was searching for you?
3. If we think of ourselves as part of the 99 left in the open country how does that make us feel? Do we feel abandoned and vulnerable or trusted and precious?
4. In the parable do you relate more easily to the lost sheep or the 99? Perhaps you relate more easily to the owner – has God laid on your heart a desire to seek out the lost?
5. How do we welcome “repentant sinners”?
6. Take time to pray that God will show you those he is seeking and calling for so that you will be able to give witness and testimony that will be an encouragement.