

What about the other Ninety Nine?



As I was reading the scriptures the other day, I came upon the passage in Luke 15: 1-10 that reads as follows:

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose 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 when he hath found [it], he layeth [it] on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together [his] friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” (KJV)

This passage is well known and is used to express the great love that God the Father and Jesus have for the lost sinners of this world. We read of their desire to go after and pursue those that have gone astray so that “none would perish” but that all would come to the saving knowledge of Jesus. (2Peter 3:9) It expresses the great joy which the Shepherd experiences when one that was lost is now found and brought back into the flock.

This is something that each and every one of us who are born again has experienced at that moment when Jesus entered our lives and became our Lord and Savior. Each of us were as, “sheep that had gone astray.” (Isaiah 53:6) For each of us there was “joy in heaven” when we were “picked up and placed on the Good Shepherd’s shoulders” and carried back to where we belong. What a great expression of God’s love for the lost.

As I continued to look into this parable and in its context within the scriptures, I went back to verses 1 and 2 for they “set the stage,” for the purpose of Jesus bringing forth this parable. We see that there were two groups of people that were with Jesus in this setting. There were the publicans, tax collectors and hard core sinners and there were the Pharisees and Scribes, known to us “lovingly” as the religious leaders of the day. Back at that time, that was exactly how the religious/social system was in the Jewish culture - the sinners (unrighteous) and the Pharisees and scribes (righteous) and “never the two shall meet.”

To get a better grasp of what the Pharisees mind set was, we need to review a brief history lesson concerning the Pharisees. Keep in mind, this is very brief. The Pharisees came into being not even 150 years before Jesus came on the scene. They were a sect of Jewish priests that believed that the Jewish people and the Jewish nation were steering away from the Torah - which by the way they were. The Pharisees wanted a return back to the Torah and the oral traditions of the rabbis. In general, the beginnings of the Pharisaical movement, was to try to bring the Jewish people to a mind set to return back to the truth of God’s Word and live by it.

The word “Pharisee” comes from the Hebrew “*parash*” which means - *to separate; to distinctively clarify and declare*. In other words, their desire was to live a “righteous” lifestyle by following the Word of God as found in the Torah. Believe it or not, the beginning of the Pharisaical sect held to a high belief in the soon coming of the Messiah. The “scribes” were an offshoot of the Pharisees, whose sole purpose was to write the Torah on scrolls. Their work was to be meticulous with not one “jot or tittle” out of place.

As we can see, they both started out with the most noblest of intentions. However, over the years, as the next generations of Pharisees and Scribes came into being, they became very political and they both ultimately became the very thing they originally wanted to get away from. The most notable flaw being that their original strong desire was for the coming of Messiah and there He was right in front of them but because of what became their spiritual arrogance and pride, they could not see the One they were waiting for.

As we continue on with our discussion, we see that, at the time of the parable, Jesus was meeting, eating and speaking with the “unrighteous.” The Pharisees and Scribes (those who were thought to be righteous) had a problem with this. Their main problem is to be found in their way of thinking. The culture and way of thinking for the Pharisees and Scribes of that time, was that for a sinner (unrighteous) to become “righteous,” like them, it was the sinner that had to make the first move towards the righteous way of living. What Jesus was expressing through His actions, was that it was the righteous that must make the first move.

Jesus, then goes and expresses the parable which we all refer to as the “Parable of the Lost Sheep.” We see that it is a good shepherd - a good, righteous shepherd/ leader - that goes and extends himself to great lengths to find the one sheep that is lost and bring it into the fold.

However, the part of this parable that struck me the most and made me stop and meditate and ponder on was the latter part found in verse 10 - “...*ninety and nine just persons...*” I kept asking myself, “What is Jesus trying to say through this.

Again, we must look into the context in which this parable was given. It was being spoken to the Pharisees and Scribes - the “righteous” - or at least those who thought they were righteous. You see, Jesus was really speaking of the “attitude of heart” that the Pharisee and Scribes had, or I should say, had lacked.

First, they lacked the desire to go and find the lost. It became all about themselves being a “step above” everyone else. Many times we as Christians have this attitude, whether we want to admit it or not. Most of us are so blind to this aspect of our heart that we look at this parable and say immediately, “Shame on you Pharisees and Scribes - Hypocrites!!” We fail to see our own “pharisaical” tendencies within our own hearts.

However, I want to share with you another aspect of this scripture that the Lord spoke to me which had to do with that pesky part of the parable found in verse 10, “...*ninety and nine just persons...*”

The thought, or I should say, the question that came to my heart was, “What were the other ninety nine sheep thinking about?” After all, they were the “good little sheep.” They didn’t wonder off. Now, they see the one sheep that was lost - and by the way it was his own fault that he wandered off and got lost - being brought back on their beloved shepherd’s shoulders. If that isn’t good enough, their beloved shepherd goes and throws a party for the lost sheep. Then their beloved shepherd has the nerve to say that there is more joy in heaven over that “stupid lost sheep” than those who were “good little lambs.” I pray that you realize that I was writing this “tongue in cheek.”

I began to think and meditate on what the attitude of the heart of the other ninety nine sheep should be? You see, when Jesus gave this parable, He was speaking it, not to the lost sheep, but rather to the “other ninety nine.” He was speaking to the heart condition of the other ninety nine, the Pharisees and Scribes, and some of us today, concerning this lost one.

It reminded me of the elder son in the “Parable of the Prodigal Son,” found a few verses later in Luke 15:11-32. When his brother came home and his father rejoiced and celebrated, all the elder brother could think about was, himself. The attitude of his heart was that of one who was hardened and did not understand what the father’s heart was all about. His father was not being a “respector of persons.” It was not that the father loved one more than the other. On the contrary, he loved them both – very much. It was about the lost son, the lost “sheep,” that was destined for destruction and eternal damnation, but was now brought out of that and into the flock. As the father states, “... *thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*” (Luke 15:32)

In both, the “Parable of the Lost Sheep” and the “Parable of the Prodigal Son,” the lost sheep and the prodigal son had a change in their heart. Yes, the shepherd went out and found the sheep. The sheep finally surrendered totally to the arms of his shepherd. The

prodigal son came to his senses and ran home into the arms of his father. In both parables there was a **true repentance** - they both turned away from the path they were on (true repentance) and turned into the arms of the “lover of their soul.” The Good Shepherd rejoiced. The Father rejoiced. The true repentant heart of the unsaved and sinner is always accepted into the flock.

It is this “true repentant heart” which causes heaven to rejoice. The attitude of the “ninety nine” as well as the “elder son” should have been the same. It should be the attitude of our heart as born again children of God. We must understand and recognize the tremendous value that our Heavenly Father places upon His most cherished of all His creation. The value He placed on all of us was the blood of His only begotten Son – Jesus. It was and is and always will be the same for anyone who truly turns from their wicked, sinful ways into the waiting arms of their loving Father and Good Shepherd.

Jesus was speaking to those, the “righteous,” who should have been rejoicing in the fact that the sinners (the unrighteous) were being reached out to and being brought out of the depths of ruin and destruction. Being the “ninety nine” means that we already had our “heavenly time of rejoicing.” Now as the “righteous” we are to rejoice and not become “class oriented” with the same mentality that the Pharisees had which was - the sinners (unrighteous) and the Pharisees and scribes (righteous) and “never the two shall meet.”

There is no “time” in Heaven or in the Spirit realm as we know time. That is why Jesus expresses that the *“first shall be last and the last shall be first – he who has ears to hear, let them hear.”* It does not matter when salvation comes to the heart of a person; what matters is that salvation comes to the heart of a person. It does not matter how far away a person may have gone astray; what matters is that that person truly has a heart that desires to repent and turn from that life of sin and fall into the arms of our Heavenly Father and that the person bears the fruits of that repentant heart. (Luke 3:8)

We must have a heart that truly grasps and understands the heart of the Master when we read the “Parable of the Laborers.” The master paid all the laborers the same wages no matter what time they started working. (Matthew 20 1-16) There is no need to be envious or jealous or to have an “elitist” attitude. The reward is the same for all of us who have been, “...brought out of darkness into the Kingdom of His dear Son.”

If you have the wonderful privilege of being one of the “ninety nine,” then “rejoice with Heaven” that the lost are being reached and being brought into the Kingdom. God loves us all the same. We all experience our own time of “heaven rejoices” when we are brought into the flock by our Good Shepherd. However, that “heavenly rejoicing” is just our “engagement party” not to be compared to the celebration that we will experience and be a part of at the great “Marriage Feast” in which we all will partake of when, not just our Good Shepherd comes for us, but He will come for us as our Bridegroom. We will no longer be sheep, but we will be His Bride.

Now that, I believe, is what being the “ninety nine,” is all about.