

## ***“Rejoicing over One”***

God’s people, like sheep, have been scattered. The enemy nations attack to obtain their wealth and their land. Others attack from hatred – hatred that God’s people would confess before the world that there is no other God than Yahweh – a hatred not to be extinguished until the children of God are driven into the sea.

But the scattering is not just a result of “those people” out there – it comes from within – from those in the house of Israel. Political and religious leaders have exploited and fleeced the sheep instead of caring for them – they feed themselves while the sheep go hungry.

God’s people have seen many a “day of clouds and thick darkness” – but into this darkness the Lord speaks the light of His promise. “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.” The Lord will seek out His sheep and rescue them. He will gather them and feed them. He makes them to lie down in green pastures – binding up the injured and strengthening the weak.

“I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd.” In faithfulness to His promise the Lord takes David from shepherding his father’s flock – and makes him king over Israel – to shepherd and feed the people of God.

But this promise is not ultimately about King David. It’s about David’s greater Son – Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

What Ezekiel foretells, we see in the Gospel reading from St. Luke. Scattered sheep (tax collectors and sinners) are being gathered – they “were all drawing near to hear Jesus.” David’s greater Son is shepherding the sheep. The Good Shepherd’s voice rings out – gathering them with His Word – healing and strengthening them with His forgiveness.

What the Lord has promised, Jesus is fulfilling. He sits at table with those who have been scattered, with the tax collectors and sinners – and the religious leaders of the day grumble, because Jesus “receives sinners and eats with them.”

They are grumbling because the Lord is doing what He has promised to do. They grumble because He sends His Son to shepherd His people. They grumble because God Himself sits at table with sinners, and eats with them.

They are grumbling about what the Apostle Paul says to Pastor Timothy in the Epistle reading. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ...”

They will not accept such sinners at their tables. They will not accept Jesus. They will not hold to the Lord’s promise of a shepherd to gather them. So, Jesus told them this parable, “What man of you ....?”

Jesus is speaking to all the Pharisees and Scribes – but He makes it very personal – very individual. “What man of you ...?” No group think here – no going along with the crowd – what do you have to say – what would you do if you had a hundred sheep and lost one of them ...?

Truth be told, some of the Pharisees and scribes might simply write off one lost sheep and rejoice over the 99 who are safe. That’s often our approach. We focus on the 99, not the 1

There is much to rejoice in with the 99 – and all that they can do for you. The 1, the lost 1 – well – he’s a problem. He requires time and energy. Are we to search and care for the one who is, who knows where – and possibly risk the ones in the “open country”?

Regardless of what the Pharisees and scribes – what you and I would do – the man in the parable does what the Lord has promised to do. The Good Shepherd searches for the lost one – and finding it, He lays it on His shoulders, rejoicing.

The shepherd with lost sheep in tow comes home and calls His friends and neighbors to gather round – “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” And some of those who hear Him think – is that really a reason to rejoice? They mutter, “one ... you found one?” They grumble, “I had one that was lost last week ... it’s not a rare thing.” It’s what sheep do. They wander. They get lost.

“Just so,” the Shepherd says, “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over ONE sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

The Pharisees and scribes are not repenting – they think they are righteous – that they are not lost – that they don’t need anyone to seek them out, to gather them – to save them. The tax collectors and sinners? They are drawing near to hear Jesus. Are they repentant? Do they have ears to hear. Do YOU?

The parable continues – “Or what woman having ten silver coins” and loses one of them? Now we’re talking 10%. Is it worth the time and effort? It is to the ONE who is lost. And it is to Jesus, who says – “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over ONE sinner who repents.”

Rejoicing over ONE sinner. You are the ONE – the sinner that Jesus seeks. God promised to send a Shepherd – and that Shepherd Jesus sat at table and ate with sinners. That didn’t just happen 2,000 years ago – that’s what’s happening today.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came into the world for YOU. YOU personally. YOU individually.

Will YOU rejoice, or grumble? Will you deny your sin and become all self-righteous? Will you see yourself as lost and not worthy of being sought out – denying that the Lord would ever receive someone like you?

Or, will you hear the Shepherd’s voice – cry out for mercy – and in repentance be carried back to the Shepherd’s house? The Lord Jesus has gathered YOU here today – to sit at Table with Him – to rejoice with Him, the angels of God, and all of heaven – “over ONE sinner who repents”? Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.