

## INTRODUCE

Good morning! Welcome to Fathom Church. It's good to meet with you this morning on this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend.

Hello and welcome to those of you streaming online. We're glad you joined us this morning as well.

If you don't know me, my name is Eric Shelly and I am on the preaching team here at Fathom and I also serve as the Treasurer here at the church.

So, as Treasurer, I help oversee the budget, I report to the elders and to the church about giving, and I really manage all finance-related matters here at Fathom.

- Some of you may be wondering right now, 'what qualifies someone to be a church Treasurer?'
  - And the answer to that is... not a whole lot. I was willing to do it
  - Chris was like "*You're willing to do this? Great, you're hired.*"
- In addition to being willing to do it, I do have a degree in Finance and work in Finance for my day job... so that helps a little bit as well
  - When I was in college and studied Finance,
  - In my junior and senior years of college I had 4 roommates
  - They were all engineers – 2 were mechanical engineering majors, 1 was in chemical engineering, and 1 was in biomedical engineering
    - Some smart dudes
    - I'm not sure how the business guy ended up with a bunch of engineer friends... but I did
    - These guys were my best friends in college... we'd do about everything together and were always hanging out together in our apartment
  - When we'd hang out, usually we talked about typical stuff that college guys talk about:
    - Sports, girls, quoting movie lines, lifting weights, music
    - But believe it or not, sometimes we'd talk about our schoolwork... about what we were studying... what we were learning
  - And it was always kind of funny... they were studying some hard stuff

- In addition to studying chemistry, physics, and other technical stuff, these guys took a bunch of math courses
- Algebra, Calculus, Trigonometry
- Linear algebra, Differential equations
- Some pretty advanced math courses... well beyond what I studied in Finance
- But we would talk and my engineer buddies would say, *"I don't understand what you're studying. What is finance? Is it just learning about money"*
  - And I came to realize that God created each person's mind differently
    - Some could learn and understand linear algebra easily
    - Like the movie Good Will Hunting, they could just walk up to a blackboard and solve a really complex math problem
    - But they didn't understand how a mutual fund worked, or how interest rates worked
  - So, I had to find a way to explain what I was studying in a way that they could understand it
- I came to explain finance to them in this way: **Finance is about determining value.**
  - \$100 today will have a different value a year from now... or 5 years from now. What is that value?
  - Or, What value do I need today if I want to have \$100, 5 years from now?
- Its oversimplifying it, but that's what Finance is: it is determining value.
- And that's what today's passage in Matthew 18 is about as well. It is about **determining value.**
- Determining Kingdom value: What does Jesus value in His Kingdom?
- How are we valued in the Kingdom of Heaven?
- We're going to discuss value today

## CONTEXT

Please take out your bibles – your own book, on a phone, or one of the hard-backed bibles beneath your seat.

- We'll be in Matthew 18 today

- Matthew 18 is on page 823 in the hard-backed bibles

While you're turning there, I want to give a bit of context... a bit of review on where we've been in Matthew so far this summer.

- In May we resumed our series in Matthew
- And throughout May and June, we've studied Matthew 16, 17, and 18
- This section of Matthew's gospel is largely focused on Jesus' teachings to his disciples
  - At times during his ministry, Jesus teaches crowds of people, like in the Sermon on the Mount
  - At other times, Jesus interacts with the Pharisees or religious leaders, and the gospels record those accounts
  - The gospels also tell of times where Jesus interacts with individual people, healing them, or conversing with them
  - And then there are times where Jesus was alone with his 12 disciples, where he is simply teaching them – with very few other people around
- This portion of Matthew that we're preaching through this summer is one of those sections where Jesus is mainly teaching just his disciples
  - He's walking them through the details of His Kingdom
  - Showing them what his Kingdom looks like
  - So that the disciples know what the Kingdom looks like before Jesus is rejected and crucified and ascends into heaven
- Matthew 18 began with the disciples having the "GOAT" debate
  - Not 'the parable of the sheep and goats'... the GOAT debate
  - As you know, GOAT stands for *Greatest Of All Time*
  - Sports fans often have this debate: asking 'who is the greatest?' 'who is the best?'
    - Michael Jordan? LeBron James? Kareem? Kobe? Who is the greatest?
    - Who is the greatest soccer player? Is it Messi? Ronaldo? Or Pele?
    - Sports fans, sports talk radio, ESPN, are often having these conversations
- Apparently, Jesus' disciples were no different than sports fans. Matthew 18 starts with them asking 'Who is the greatest?'

- But instead of discussing athletes, they're having the argument about themselves!
- Is it Peter? James? John?
- Who is the greatest? Which disciple is the GOAT?
- Jesus answers their Goat question in two ways
  - First, he gives them a *visual*. He brings a child in front of them and says in Matthew 18:4
 

**<sup>4</sup>Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.** (emphasis mine)
  - Chris preached on this two weeks ago. Jesus' point was that the humble – those who have childlike faith – are the greatest in the kingdom
  - Next, Jesus gives them a *parable* to answer their question. That's what we read in today's passage.
    - Only instead of talking about goats, Jesus is going to talk about sheep!
    - Today's passage is commonly called 'The Parable of the Lost Sheep'
- Let's start reading this passage
- Matthew 18, starting in verse 10:

**<sup>10</sup> "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."**

### **VERSES 10-11: Guardian Angels**

Have you heard the term "flyover states" or "flyover country"?

- It's a somewhat derogatory political term
- It refers to the states in the middle of the country
- That aren't really destinations for tourists or travelers
- People fly over these states while they're going to the East or the West coasts, while they're going to New York or California
  - So middle American states like Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Arkansas, etc.
  - Geographically, Colorado fits the description as well,
    - but because of the mountains and tourist destinations in our state
    - Colorado may not be included in these

- Now, the implication with the term “flyover states” is that they are less important
  - This could mean politically less important
  - Less important from a tourist destination standpoint
  - Or simply less interesting to visit

When we read our Bibles, we need to be on the lookout for what I call “flyover verses.”

- These are verses in the Bible that we sort of skim over, to get to the verses we deem to be more important, or more applicable, or ones we commit to memory or put on pictures on our walls
- I think verse 10 is one of those potentially flyover verses
  - It’s part of the story here, but it’s really easy to skim over as we try to read what Jesus says about the sheep in verses 12-14
  - But I sometimes we can skim over some of these verses and miss the important truth that they contain for us
  - I think there’s something in verse 10 that is important to our discussion today. Let’s read it again:

<sup>10</sup> “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”

- By little ones, Jesus is again referring to children... this is still a continuation of Jesus’ response to the disciples’ GOAT question
- Where, Jesus brought a child before the disciples to show them how child-like humility brings greatness in heaven
- He is continuing to talk about children here, calling them ‘little ones’

But I want to point you to the second half of this verse, which reads “in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven”

- in heaven *their* angels (emphasis mine)
- This implies that each person has angels – not just one, but angels plural – assigned to them, assigned to their care
- Verse 10 says they ‘always see the face of God’,
  - meaning the angels have direct and continuous contact with God,
  - and by that direct and continuous contact with God, they are able to carry out God’s guidance and protection in our lives
- So, this is where the idea of guardian angels comes from. From verse 10

- I always thought the idea of a guardian angel was more of a secular idea
  - You know, the little angel on your shoulder, who argues with the little devil on your other shoulder
  - Or the idea that a loved one who died then goes to heaven to watch over you and becomes your guardian angel
  - Or that our guardian angels hover around us at all times and keep us safe at all times
- Now the Bible doesn't support any of those ideas
- But throughout the Bible, there are many instances of God sending angels to individuals in times of need:
  - In the book of 1 Kings, Elijah has fled from Jezebel and is basically hiding out in the wilderness and an angel comes to bring him food and water so he has strength to travel
  - In Matthew 4, after Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, we read that angels come and minister to Jesus and take care of him
  - In Acts 12 an angel shows up in the middle of the night and breaks Peter out of prison
- And verse 10 does seem to support the idea that we each have angels assigned to us
- So here's what I think we can say from verse 10:
  - God values us so much
  - that he assigns individual angels
  - to guide and protect each of us
- More simply, God will **Guard What Is Valuable** SLIDE

### **ILLUSTRATION: Security Detail, Secret Service**

In some ways, the idea of a guardian angel is like having a body guard.

Anyone here have a bodyguard? Anyone have a security detail assigned to them? I didn't think so

- That's something I've never seen here in my 8 years attending Fathom:
  - I haven't seen anyone one roll into Fathom on Sunday mornings with an entourage
  - ... with some dude with an earpiece clearing the hallway before you walk down it

- ... standing in the back of the chapel, watching the crowd while you're singing
- Please don't take this the wrong way... but, no one here has bodyguards
  - ... because no one here is important enough to need one
- Don't get this twisted – everyone here is important. Just not on the level that we need our own personal security detail to come to church!
- The people who have security teams are either
  - *Celebrities* who are so famous and popular that some crazy fan may want to try to get too close to them,
  - or, *political leaders* who are so important to the country's leadership that they need extra layers of protection – think: the Secret Service
- We assign protection to the people that are important to our society
- Just as we protect – and we guard – the things that are valuable to us
  - We install security alarms on our homes and our cars
  - We put valuable and important items into a safe
  - And we hire bodyguards and security to protect valuable and important people
- God is no different. Just like us, God will **Guard What Is Valuable** to Him
  - That's my first point this morning – that God will **Guard What is Valuable**
  - He assigns angels to care for us
  - To guide us and guard us
  - Because each of us – each of God's children – are immensely valuable to Him
  - And so, He guards what he values

And in God's eyes, we are all valuable.

- Don't know about you, but that makes me feel special. It makes me feel valued by God
- My own spiritual security detail. My own angelic entourage
- God values us – values you – enough that He's assigned angels to you, to Guard What Is Valuable to Him **BLANK SLIDE**

### **VERSE 11: Missing Verse**

As we move on, you may notice, there is no verse 11 in your text.

- Verse 11 is missing
- There is probably a little footnote that explains this missing verse
- The verse is missing because the oldest manuscripts of Matthew that we have, do not contain verse 11
- The footnote states that the missing verse reads **The Son of Man came to save what was lost**
- In other words, the Son of Man – who is Jesus – came to save what may get lost. He came to find and save the lost.
- This sets up the next verse, verse 12.

## VERSE 12

Let's read it together:

**<sup>12</sup> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?**

So, I have a simple math problem for us this morning.

I know that you were told 'that there would be no math' here at church, but this one is easy: **SLIDE**

$$\begin{array}{r} 100 \\ -1 \\ \hline = 99 \end{array}$$

- Pretty easy math problem, right? Most of us can handle this one?
- This is not the linear algebra that my engineer roommates were studying in college.

This is simple math because Jesus is giving a simple parable to his disciples. He's creating a simple way to teach them about value.

Let's break down the numbers here. Starting with 100:

- Verse 12 says, **a man has a hundred sheep**
  - The number 100 really isn't significant. It's meant to be a larger number
  - Signifying that the man has a lot of sheep. A flock of sheep
  - This shepherd is caring for many of sheep
- So, he's got 100 sheep and verse 12 says **and one of them has gone astray**
  - This is the '1' that is being subtracted in our math problem



- One of the sheep wanders off...
- Let's talk about this guy for a minute
- The 'Lost Sheep' in this 'Parable of the Lost Sheep'
- A lost sheep is pretty easy to understand – a sheep wanders away from the flock. It wanders off and gets lost. That makes sense
- But again, this is a parable – a story about sheep that teaches us about the Kingdom
- So, what does “the lost” mean for us?
- What does Jesus mean here when he's talking about the lost? Who are the lost sheep?

### EXPLAIN: THE LOST

The Greek verb used here, *planaō* means “to go astray” or “wander away”<sup>1</sup>

- Most commentators say this refers not to unbelievers...
  - As in, the non-Christians,
  - The people who don't believe in Jesus
  - Or have not yet put their faith in Jesus
  - This isn't referring to them
- But rather, in this parable, “the lost” refers to *believers* who get lost in their faith
  - Those who have a relationship with Christ
  - Those already in the faith,
  - Already part of the body of believers
- Given the context of this passage, and its focus on children, or “little ones”, Jesus is likely speaking about those in the body of believers who may be
  - Newer Christians
  - Younger believers – not necessarily young age-wise,
  - But believers who may still be immature in their faith
- It is the newer believers who are more prone to get lost or go astray
  - Because they have not yet fully established their faith
  - They are still learning God's Word

---

<sup>1</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Mt 18:10–14). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- Understanding how to apply it to their lives
- Learning what it means to follow Christ
- and be a part of a church
- Because they are still young in their faith, it is easier of them to “get lost” in their faith
  - They may be more easily tempted and pulled away by worldly desires
  - They may not have discipleship support around them
  - They aren’t in a d-group, or don’t have many Christian friends, or Christian accountability to help them
  - They may not have lived out their faith enough yet to keep them grounded in it, especially when things get hard
- It’s easier for the new believer to wander off,
  - Which is why God has assigned guardian angels to care for them
  - And why God will seek and pursue them when they are lost
- So, “the lost” here is not necessarily the unbelievers in the world around us, but the newer, younger believers in the church
- This is who Jesus, the Shepherd, will go after, when they wander off
- When Jesus says and one of them has gone astray, this is who he’s referring to
- This is the ‘1’ that is subtracted in our math problem

## **EXPLAIN: THE DANGER FACING LOST SHEEP**

The Bible talks a lot about shepherds. It’s a very familiar and frequent topic in the Bible.

- But I wanted to learn a bit more about shepherding and what Jesus is describing in this parable
- However, I don’t know any shepherds
- I’ve never met a shepherd
- And so, I did some research to get a better sense of what shepherding looked like in Jesus’ time. I wanted to get more context to this parable

About as long as I’ve been married to my wife Anne – so going on 17 years now – we’ve loved to visit Crested Butte, Colorado.

- If you’ve never been, it’s a beautiful part of our state
- There is year round-beauty in the mountains, rivers, hillsides of wildflowers and aspens around Crested Butte

- There is terrific skiing in the winter almost unlimited options for hiking, biking, fishing, in the summer
- It is almost like this incredible oasis of beauty and outdoor activity really any time of the year
- To get there, it's about a 4-hour drive from Denver. And the longest part of the trip to me, is on US Highway 50 between Monarch Pass and Gunnison, CO
  - If you've ever driven this stretch of road
  - It's about the last third of the trip to Crested Butte
  - So as a traveler, you're starting to get anxious to get there. You're ready to be done driving and reach your destination
  - Your kids have asked "when will we get there" about 15 different times by now!
  - It's about 40 miles of 2 lane road
  - And it primarily passes through ranch land
  - In other words, there's not a lot there
    - No towns
    - A few houses and barns and things like that
    - But a whole lot of open space
  - It's rugged and hilly, but not mountainous
  - It's not forest either – it's pretty open
  - Its ranch land – not a lot of trees
- As I've studied the desert around Jerusalem, where shepherds would pasture their sheep, the image that comes to my mind is along Highway 50 in Colorado
  - Rugged, treeless, rocky, not exceptionally green
  - Kind of like this picture I found online: **picture** **SLIDE**
- It was a large, vast rocky space...
  - Suitable for grazing large flocks of sheep

So, you could imagine being a shepherd and trying to look after 100 sheep in this sort of landscape

- On a hillside, where the sheep blend into the landscape
- They practically look like rocks or boulders in this picture!
- It would be a challenge for a shepherd to keep track of and account for a large flock of sheep

- But that is the image that Jesus is painting here.
  - The shepherd knows how many sheep he is responsible for
  - He knows the exact number
  - He accounts for the entire flock, at all times
  - And he knows if any are missing... if any are lost or have wandered off

Because sheep that wander off or get lost in the desert around Jerusalem face great danger.

- Predatory animals could easily attack a lone sheep wandering by itself
- There were also robbers who would steal sheep to sell for money
  - A lone sheep is much easier to steal
- The sheep could get injured or sick with no shepherd to care for it
- The sheep could fall into or wander into a ravine and not be able to get itself out
- The sheep could be unable to find food or water on its own and could starve or die of thirst
- The dangers that a sheep alone in the wilderness could face are many
  - When a sheep is away from the safety of the flock
  - And away from the protection of the watchful shepherd
  - The sheep is in grave danger
- And the shepherd knows this. **The shepherd knows the danger that a lost sheep faces if it isn't quickly found and brought back to the flock**
- So, when a sheep wanders off, or goes astray, or gets lost,
- The shepherd will immediately **Go After the Lost**
  - As soon as the shepherd realizes a sheep has gone astray, finding it becomes his highest priority
  - He will go out into the wilderness
    - Alone
    - Day or night
    - Rain or shine
    - Regardless of time of day or whatever else he had going on
  - And he'll search
    - Scouring the hillsides looking for the sheep

- Finding high ground so that he can look for movement that might be the sheep
- Calling the sheep, which would know and recognize his voice
- Retracing the steps of the flock
- Searching the area for tracks of where the lost sheep wandered off, and then tracking it
- Until he finds that sheep
  - At which point, he'll lead the sheep back to the flock
  - Or, if it's injured, he'll lift the sheep onto his shoulder or back and carry the sheep back to the flock
- And he'll rejoice
  - And give thanks
  - That he found the lost sheep and brought it back under his protection and watchful eye
  - Only then will he rest

In this parable, Jesus is saying this is what our Heavenly Father does also. He **Goes After the Lost** **SLIDE**

- He knows the great and grave danger that a young Christian faces if they try to walk alone
- He will leave the 99 behind to go after the 1 that is lost
- He'll drop everything to go after the one that has gone astray
- He has 100 sheep, but he is reluctant to lose *any* of them
  - And so, he'll leave the 99
  - And go after the lost
  - And search
  - And pursue
- And when he finds it, he rejoices
- Because he loves and values even the one single sheep
- ...The one single person
- ...Who wanders off and gets lost

God will always **Go After the Lost**

## ILLUSTRATE: Accounting for the Lost

What Jesus teaches here about how God values the lost is remarkable and really important to how we view God

One way to illustrate this is to use another math equation.

- When you let the church Treasurer preach you get math and finance problems ... sorry!
- But this one is also easy, and I promise it's the last equation in the sermon.
- Here you go: **SLIDE**

$$99 > 1$$

- Again, we can all handle this one also, yeah?
- Basic math, basic logic tells us that 99 is far greater than 1.
- If you have \$100 and lose \$1 dollar, you aren't going to be *that* upset by the lost dollar because you still have 99 dollars
  - You can still buy a lot with \$99, even with inflation being as high as it's been!
- Put another way... One out of 100 is only 1%

As I said earlier, I studied finance in school – not accounting. I'm not a CPA, but I know that in accounting there are terms like:

- Normal Loss
- Depreciation
- Reduction
- Shrinkage
- Write-off

These are all terms for how to account for loss in business.

- There are losses that occur during the normal course of business
- During normal, regular business operations...
- Some types of losses occur
  - it is just part of the production process
  - it is a cost of doing business
  - you try to minimize the losses,
  - but you never fully eliminate them

- What an accountant does is they *account for* that loss...
  - In other words, they record it – the loss – in the company's books
- But then, after recording the loss, they turn their focus onto what *wasn't lost*
- Because what *wasn't lost* is what is most important to the company
  - That's where the revenue and profit come from
  - That's where value is made and maximized

You could imagine God simply saying:

- *Well, a 1% loss is simply the cost of doing spiritual business.*
- *It's just the normal cost of discipleship.*
- *Some young sheep are bound to wander off... I can live with a 1% loss rate*
- And he could go on his way, shepherding the remaining 99 sheep who are left

But thankfully for the lost, thankfully for us, God doesn't work that way. He doesn't think the way most businesses do

- He doesn't consider a lost sheep to be a depreciated asset, or a normal loss from operations
- Instead, when he sees a sheep go astray, he suspends operations... stops everything
- And looks for the sheep that wandered off
- He isn't only worried about the 99... he's also worried about the 1
- He accounts for the 1 just as he accounts for the 99
- Because he doesn't want **even one to get lost**

God will *always* **Go After the Lost** even if it's only one

**BLANK SLIDE**

**VERSES 13-14**

Ok, last two verses. Read verses 13 and 14 with me

**<sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**

Earlier we broke this passage down as an equation: **100 – 1 = 99**.

- And we talked about the 100.
- And we talked about the 1 that gets subtracted or lost
- But we didn't talk much about the 99 that is left
- That's what I want to do with the rest of our time... talk about the 99

As I prepare for a sermon, I do the bulk of my prep work and research in commentaries and study bibles These resources help me understand:

- the context of a passage,
- the cultural significance of some of the teachings,
- how the passage lines up against other parts of the Bible
- what other parts of the Bible parallel the passage, or support it

The commentary work is the most useful and important part of my study and prep work

But I'll also do a little bit of general internet research on the passage. This is often helpful to understand how the passage is commonly viewed

- How other pastors teach or write about the topic
- What common questions or controversies or critiques stem from the passage
- Even how our broader culture – both inside of and outside of the church – might think about the topic
- It's really helpful information to consider when writing a sermon.

As I went through the process for this sermon, there was one topic that came up that I think is important

- In several places, people questioned the idea of "leaving the 99" behind
- They questioned the idea of God prioritizing the 1 lost sheep over the 99 that stayed in the flock
- Jesus spends a lot of time in Matthew 18 talking about the "little ones" and "the lost"...
- But He doesn't talk as much about "the 99"

One blog asked "*Why would God leave the 99 to find just 1?*" Another stated, "*No good shepherd would leave 99 for 1 sheep. Why did Jesus give such a parable?*"

- The thinking is, if the shepherd leaves the flock to go looking for the one lost sheep



- These blogs asked
- *Then who is protecting the rest of the flock? Who is protecting the other sheep?*
- What about the 99?
  - What happens to them?
  - Who is protecting them?
  - Who is watching out for them?
  - When the shepherd goes to look for the 1, who protects and leads the 99?

The answer is: the 99. The 99 keep the 99 safe.

- The 99 watch out for each other while the shepherd is gone
- The shepherd leaves the 99 for a time because they are already safe. They are not lost
- The 99 have already found. The shepherd knows where they are
- And the shepherd knows that the 99 are safe even though the shepherd isn't currently with them

### **ILLUSTRATE: Burning House**

One commentator<sup>ii</sup> illustrated it this way.

- Suppose there is a father who has six kids.
- And one night, the family is asleep in their home and the smoke alarms go off
- And the father wakes to the noise of the smoke detectors and the smell of smoke

He gets out of bed and can hear the crackling of flames and see flames in the house – the house is severely on fire

- So, he runs down the hallway into his kids' bedrooms and begins waking his kids
- He wakes them from their sleep
- And out of their beds
- And rushes them down the stairs
- Out the front door
- And safely into the neighbor's front lawn across the street

And when he gets there, he takes a count. Johnny, Jimmy, Ashley, Emma, Ben... where is Sally?! Sally is missing!

- Five children are safe, but one isn't

- One is still somewhere inside the house!

So, what does a father do? You can bet he goes back inside the house to find Sally!

- He leaves his other kids on that front lawn
- He leaves them behind so he can go back inside to look for the lost child
- Because the other 5 kids are already safe. He knows where they are
- He knows that while he's gone, looking for Sally, the older ones can look after and comfort the younger ones
- He knows that while he's gone, the five kids can keep each other together and keep each other safe
- Until he returns with their lost sister

Listen Church, God is no different.

- God is the good shepherd and a good father.
- And like a good shepherd he **Gives Value to All** of his sheep. SLIDE
- Like a good father, he **Gives Value to All** of his children.

He values the 99 just as much as he values the 1 that is lost

- But that doesn't mean that he won't leave the 99 safely behind to go find the 1 that is lost
- As verse 14 points out to us, 'it is not His will that even one of these should perish'
- All are loved and valued by our Good, Heavenly Father

I think there is a second thing to point out when we're talking about the 99 sheep

And that's that the 99 are together *where and when* the shepherd leaves them

- There is safety in the flock
- There is security in the flock
- Just like in my illustration about the house fire, when the dad goes away to find the lost child
  - While he's gone
  - The older brothers and sisters will watch over the younger ones
  - Until the father comes back

I think for us, the flock represents the church

- Once Jesus has found us
- It is important for us to be in community with others
- With some who are older than us, some who are younger
- Some more and less experienced
- Some who are willing to help guide us, or correct us, or encourage us
- The text doesn't explicitly say this here, but the local church is like our flock
  - The flock is necessary for our spiritual safety and protection in our walks with the Lord
  - Our local flock helps keep us from wandering off on our own

### **APPLICATION: FOR ALL 100**

Now, maybe there are some here this morning who would say that you haven't yet put your faith in Christ

- Maybe you're here because a friend or family member invited you
- Or maybe you're here for some other reason... I don't know
- I hope that Jesus is calling you this very minute
- And that the Spirit is stirring up something in you right now
- I hope and pray that you are hearing how much Jesus loves and values each of us,
- That he's willing to go to all lengths to bring each single one of us into His flock
- I pray that you leave here this morning knowing how much you are valued and loved in the Kingdom of heaven

But my guess is that the majority who got up this morning and came to church, did so because you are already a believer in Christ.

- So, going to church is part of your discipline as a believer
- Community with the flock on a Sunday morning is part of what you do each week

For those who are believers, I think there is a challenging part of this parable for us. Its in the second half of verse 13. Where we read, **he rejoices over it [the lost sheep that was found] more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.**

In other words,

- when someone wanders from the faith,
- and Jesus brings them home,

- there is great rejoicing in heaven
- More rejoicing than over the 99 who were faithful all along

Now, if you're part of the 99, it is easy to read or to hear this and ask

- *What about me? Or what about us?*
- *How is this parable fair to us, to the 99?*
- *I understand that God already considers me safe and found and so He'll leave to go find the lost. I get that*
- *But, I've been a good sheep for a while now. I've been faithful!*
  - *I haven't wandered off*
  - *I obey the rules and the laws*
  - *I read my Bible every day*
  - *I pray regularly*
  - *I have a daily quiet time*
  - *I'm in a d-group*
  - *I even tithe and give to the church!*
- *Shouldn't I be the one that God celebrates?! Shouldn't those of us who are faithful be the ones that the Lord rejoices over?*
  - *Why does God rejoice more, over finding the lost*
  - *Instead of rejoicing over the many faithful remaining faithful?*

When I first started studying this parable, I found myself with a similar thought. Am I alone on this?

- Does anyone else find it strange that God would leave the 99 behind to go after just 1?
- Isn't it strange that God would rejoice when *one is found*,
  - More than he would rejoice over *the 99 who stayed faithful?*
- Do you find it strange that He rewards the lost sheep who wanders
  - Rather than rewarding the faithfulness and obedient who stay?

I found myself relating to what some of these blogs were asking. But, then, I was reminded how much it sounds like someone in another one of Jesus' parables

The parable told by Jesus in Luke 15 is commonly referred to as the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*

- But some commentators point out that it is better called the Parable of the Two Brothers
- Because just as our parable today isn't only about the 1 lost sheep
- The parable of the prodigal isn't only about the Prodigal Son
- In addition to the 1 lost sheep... there are 99 who are left behind
- In addition to the prodigal son... there is the older brother

In Luke 15, the prodigal son is the one who takes his inheritance from his father and squanders it all, living foolishly and lavishly

- He blows his entire inheritance and doesn't even have money left to buy food
- And so, he returns to his father's estate in hopes that his father will simply allow him to be one of the servants at the estate

Meanwhile, the older brother remains at home with the father, helping to work and oversee his entire estate. The older brother remains faithful to his father

- So, one day, the older brother is returning from working in the fields, just as he's done faithfully every day
- As he's coming home for the evening, he hears music and laughter and sees that the house is full of people because there's a party going on
- He knows it isn't anyone's birthday or anything like that, so he asks one of the servants what is going on
- And the servant tells him that his younger brother has returned...
- And that his father was so happy that he's killed the fattened calf and hired a band and brought in the caterers ...
- And he's invited all of their friends, family, and neighbors to join him in celebrating the return of his son
- And the older brother resents it
- He gets angry
- And he lashes out at his father, saying  
 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

Do you feel like that when you read today's parable? Have you ever felt the way the older brother in this parable felt?

- I have at times
- I can look at my life and my relationship with Jesus and ask “*how could anyone wander away from that?*”
- “*Why would anyone wander away from Jesus? How foolish!*”
- And it becomes very easy for me to fall into the older brother’s thinking...
- Of self-righteousness and resentment towards the 1 lost sheep
- All the while, forgetting how the father responds to the older brother. The father responds by saying,  
<sup>31</sup> “*My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.* <sup>32</sup> *But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”*

Church, here’s the bigger point:

**Not only is Jesus’ love for the 1 lost sheep good news for that lost sheep, it is good news for *all* the sheep<sup>2</sup>**

- Because it means that Jesus doesn’t only love us
  - Because we obey the rules
  - And read our bibles
  - And pray every day
  - And act like good faithful Christians
- That isn’t why he loves us
- That isn’t why he’ll go out in search of each one of us
- It’s not because we’re good sheep that He values us

**He loves us because *he simply loves us*.** That’s all. No strings attached, no qualifications.

- Jesus doesn’t see a lost sheep wander off...
- And just shrug his shoulders and say,
- “*Well, they weren’t really living their life for me anyway. They weren’t truly faithful. That was bound to happen...*”
- No! He says “*I love them. They are one of mine.*”

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://medium.com/nobody-left-out/a-message-to-the-99-good-sheep-jesus-left-behind-5f93bc88dc2>

- “I’m not willing to lose even one of them”
- And so, he’ll leave the rest of the flock to go find them
- He’ll go out into the wilderness and search and call for them
- He’ll go back into the burning house to go find them

And as one of the 99, we can learn that if he loves the 1 unconditionally, then he loves us unconditionally also.

- He would search the wilderness or the burning house for any and every one of us
- And that is good news.
- Not just for the 1 sheep. Not just for the 99 sheep.
  - But for all the sheep.
- All the sheep have value to Jesus. He loves all his sheep
  - No matter how long they have strayed
  - Or how far away they have wandered
  - Or what they’ve done while they’ve wandered
- The Shepherd loves them. The Shepherd loves *you*.
- He values each of us immensely. Its why he **Guards What is Valuable**
- He loves each of us unconditionally. Its why he’ll **Go After the Lost**, even if it is just one person out of 100
- And He values all of us. Its why he **Gives Value to All** 100. Not just the 99 who are faithful. Not just the 1 who wanders.
- But all of his sheep. All of his children.
- All are loved and valued by the Shepherd
- And He loves YOU and He values YOU

Let’s pray

\* \* \* \* \*

## RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – The Lord’s Supper – a celebration and reminder of Christ’s work on the cross (If you aren’t a believer...)

- GIVING – Tithes and offerings – a celebration and reminder of God’s gift of Jesus (If Fathom isn’t your home church...)
- PRAYER – [fathomchurch.org/prayer](http://fathomchurch.org/prayer) (If you need prayer today...)
- SINGING – Reflection and proclamation.

*First song:* reflection. In 1 CORINTHIANS 11. Paul lays out the words of institution for the Lord’s Supper. But he also calls us to examine ourselves before we participate.

## COMMUNION

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll continue to sing:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” TAKE

<sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” TAKE

<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.dreamstime.com/sheep-pasture-judean-desert-israel-image157317462> ID 157317462 © Msalena | Dreamstime.com

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/leave-the-99.html>