

KINGDOM. SUPPLEMENT 6

[THE PARABLES OF JESUS]
THE LOST SHEEP and THE LOST COIN

**The parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14
and the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10 are parables about
GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LOST IN HIS KINGDOM.**

A. THE LOST SHEEP (in the Gospel of Matthew)

Read Matthew 18:12-14.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Teach. The story is almost the same as that in Luke 15:1-7.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

Although the parables of the lost sheep in the Gospel of Luke and in the Gospel of Matthew resemble one another, they are *not parallels*. This is an example how Jesus used the same parable in another context to teach another message or lesson.

(1) The setting of this parable is contained in Matthew 18:1-11.

The disciples of Jesus had been quarrelling about who of them was the greatest in God's kingdom. Jesus knew what they had been quarrelling about and so he did three things: He gave them an example, a warning and a task. He used a little child as an example how the disciples should become, he warned them of causing other people to fall into sin, and he told them the parable of the lost sheep to tell them what they should be occupied with in their daily lives.

Jesus gives his disciples an example. He exhorts them to become converted and "become like little children". Their worldly ambition and striving to be the greatest should make place for willingness to be the least. Some of the favourable qualities associated with a child are simplicity, frankness, obedience, unpretentiousness and especially humility and trustfulness.

Jesus gives his disciples a warning. He warns them that they should be on their guard not to cause one of 'God's children', that is, Christians, whether they are still children or adults in maturity, to fall into sin. The conduct of the disciples could cause God's children to stumble and fall into sin. Especially the yearning to be greater than one's fellowmen and to rule over them is not merely a passive attitude, but an active drive, which could hurt people and cause them to stumble. Instead, the disciples should regard God's children, that is Christians, very highly (Romans 12:10), because God regards them so highly that he has appointed his illustrious angels to keep watch over them (Hebrews 1:14).

Jesus gives his disciples a task. He teaches them to devote their attention to bringing God's children, who wander off, back again. The context of this parable is quite different than the context of the same parable in Luke 15.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Matthew 18:12-13.

(3) The explanation and application of this parable is contained in Matthew 18:13-14.

When Jesus says that the shepherd is happier about the one sheep that had wandered off when it is found than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off, he does not intend to say that he is not happy with the ninety-nine. He merely wants to emphasise the fact that God's is very happy when a Christian who has wandered away from the Christian Church is sought and found.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

The context of this parable is quite different than the context of the same parable in Luke 15:1-7. Therefore also the details of this parable will signify different realities.

The hundred sheep represent God's children, the Christians.

The lost sheep represents one of God's children, thus a Christian, who wanders away from the Christian Church and from the Christian faith.

The ninety-nine other sheep represent the other Christians in the Church, who did not wander off. But they do *not form a relevant detail* in this parable, and only function as a kind of background, making the attention devoted to the one wandering Christian stand out all the more clearly. In this parable the emphasis is on the heart of the shepherd for even just one of his sheep that strayed away, especially when it is still an immature child or teenager (Matthew 18:5-10)! The shepherd has greater joy in bringing a stray sheep back to the fold than maintaining the status quo in the flock. His passion is that not one of his sheep is lost! Ultimately, not a single sheep is lost (John 17:12; John 18:9)!

But in the other parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7 the 99 other sheep form a contrast with the one lost sheep and then *the 99 sheep is a relevant detail*. Here the 99 sheep represent the Jews who criticize Jesus for caring about the tax-collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1). The shepherd has greater joy about this one unbeliever that becomes a believer than about the 99 people who think that they do not need to come to faith!

The shepherd above all signifies God the Father, who represents the Holy Trinity. He possesses all the sheep and is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost!

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14 teaches about "God's attitude towards lost people in his kingdom".

The main message of the parable is the following. "God's revealed will is that not a single one of his own sheep should perish, but that they all be saved completely. God's yearning love for his wandering children causes him to seek them and return them to the church.

God/Jesus Christ is not more joyful about one Christian that goes astray than about the 99 Christians who do not go astray. His joy to be a Benefactor that seeks, finds and returns one lost sheep, is greater than merely being the Possessor of Christians (maintaining the status quo)! The emphasis is not the one sheep going astray, but on the Shepherd who seeks, finds and returns the lost sheep. The emphasis is on God's passion and love to bring Christians that go astray back to the right path."

Seeking the wandering and lost people in order to lead them back is one of the fundamental characteristics of God's kingdom. The genuine people in God's kingdom follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and go out to seek those who have wandered away from the Christian Church and the Christian faith in order to bring them back.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Read Deuteronomy 5:29; Psalm 119:176; Isaiah 45:22-23; 48:17-19; Ezekiel 18:23,32; 33:11; Matthew 9:37-38, 11:28-29; 23:37; John 7:37; James 5:19-20; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parable teaches?

Notes.

The glorious truth, that God is not willing that any of these little ones (God's children) should be lost, is in line with the teaching of the Bible. Jesus said, "I have not lost one of those you gave me" (John 18:9)! The application of the parable shows that the emphasis is more on God (Jesus Christ) who is seeking the wandering person than on the person who is wandering off!

B. THE LOST COIN

Read Luke 15:8-10.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The silver coin, which was lost, was worth about one day's wages. For a day-labourer that was a lot of money! The woman may have worn the ten silver coins on a chain around her neck, or, more likely, she may have tied them up in a little rag tied to her dress. The chain may have broken or the knot may have worked loose, with the result that one of the coins fell out and got lost. The home of poor people in Jesus' day consisted of a small dwelling, with a dirt floor and either no windows or very small ones. Because her house was very dark, she could not find coin. But after she had lit a lamp and had swept the whole floor, she found her lost coin. In her joy she called all her friends and neighbours and told them what had happened.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

- (1) The setting of the parable is the same as that of the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7.
 - (2) The story of the parable is contained in Luke 15:8-9.
 - (3) The explanation or application of the parable is contained in Luke 15:10.
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3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

- (1) Treating this parable as an allegory (allegorising).

Some interpreters have come up with the interpretation that “the woman” symbolises the Holy Spirit. They come to this conclusion by a process of elimination. “The father” in the parable of the lost son represents God the Father. “The man who had a hundred sheep” in the parable of the lost sheep represents God the Son. And thus “the woman” in the parable of the lost coin must represent God the Holy Spirit.

Others interpret “the woman” as representing the Church. “The lamp” indicates the gospel. “The broom” (which is not even mentioned!) signifies the law. These interpretations are not correct and must be rejected.

The explanation of Jesus. Jesus does not give any meaning to the various details of this parable. But he does explain the parable as representing God and his angels rejoicing in heaven over even one of his lost creatures who repents and returns to him.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10 teaches about “God’s attitude towards lost people in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of this parable is the following. “God, who has his dwelling in the presence of the angels, seeks lost people and rejoices over even one of them who repents or is converted.”

Seeking the wandering and lost in order to lead them back is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The people in God’s kingdom follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and go out to seek wandering and lost people and bring them back so that they may be saved.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

See the parable of the lost son.
