

ONE LOST SHEEP NO. 2083

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD' S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 28, 1889,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.”
Matthew 18:12-13.*

THIS passage occurs in a discourse of our Savior against *despising one of those little ones that believe in Him*. He foretells a dreadful doom for those who, in their contempt for the little ones, cause them to stumble, and He forbids that contempt by a variety of forcible arguments upon which we cannot now dwell. There is a tendency, apparent at this present time, to think little of the conversion of individuals and to look upon the work of the Holy Spirit upon each separate person as much too slow a business for this progressive age.

We hear grand theories of a theocracy of a kind unknown to Holy Scripture—a semi-political dominion of the Lord over masses wherein the individuals are unregenerate. We listen to great swelling words about the uplifting of nations and the advancement of the race. But these lofty ideas do not produce facts, nor have they any moral power. Our “cultured” teachers are weary of the humdrum work of bringing individual souls into light. They want to do it wholesale, by a far more rapid process than that of personal salvation. They are tired of the units, their great minds dwell upon “the solidarity of the race.”

I am bold to assert that if ever we despise the method of individual conversion, we shall get into an unsound order of business altogether, and find ourselves wrecked upon the rocks of hypocrisy. Even in those right glorious times when the Gospel shall have the freest course, and shall run the most quickly and be the most extensively glorified, its progress will still be after the former manner of the conviction, conversion, and sanctification of individuals. Individuals who shall each one believe and be baptized according to the Word of the Lord.

I fear lest in any of you there should be even the least measure of despising the one lost sheep because of the large and philosophical methods which are now so loudly cried up. I would not have you exchange the gold of individual Christianity for the base metal of Christian Socialism. If the wanderers are to be brought in in vast numbers, as I pray they may be, yet must it be accomplished by the bringing of them in one by one. To attempt national regeneration without personal regeneration is to dream of erecting a house without separate bricks. In the vain attempt to work in the gross, we may miss the practical result which would have followed working in detail. Let us settle it in our minds that we cannot do better than obey the example of our Lord Jesus, given us in the text and go after the one sheep which has gone astray.

Our text warns us that *we are not to despise one person, even on account of evil character*. The first temptation is to despise *one*, because he is only one. The next is to despise one, because that one is so little. The next and perhaps the most dangerous form of the temptation, is to despise one, because that one has gone astray. The individual is not in the right path, not obeying the law, nor reflecting credit on the church, but doing much that vexes the spiritual and grieves the holy. Yett we are not, therefore, to despise him. Read the eleventh verse—“The Son of man is come to save that which was lost.”

In the Greek, the word “lost” is a very strong word—we may read it, “that which is destroyed.” It does not mean “that which is nonexistent,” as you can clearly see. But that which is destroyed as to usefulness to the shepherd, as to happiness to itself, and as to working out the intent for which it was created. If any are so effectually destroyed by sin that their existence is a greater calamity than their nonexistence would have been. If they are now dead in trespasses and sins, and even offensive in character, yet must we not despise them. The Son of man did not despise such, since, “He has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Many a soul that has been so destroyed as to be lost to itself, lost to God, lost to his people, lost to anything like hope and holiness, the Lord Jesus Christ has saved by His gracious power. *He values each one.* This is the lesson which I would teach this morning to the utmost of my power. May the Holy Spirit teach it also.

In considering the words of our Lord which are now before us, I beg you to notice, first, that *the Lord Jesus herein shows peculiar interest in one lost soul.* Secondly, *He puts forth special exertion for the rescue of this lost one.* And thirdly, *He displays a special rejoicing when the lost one is restored.* When we have thought of all this, we shall then observe, fourthly, that *He sets us a very striking example,* herein teaching us to care for each soul destroyed by sin.

I. First, then, in the words before us, OUR SAVIOR SHOWS PECULIAR INTEREST IN ONE LOST SOUL.

Note in the commencement, that for the sake of those lost ones, *our Lord assumes a special character.* The eleventh verse puts it, “The Son of man is come to save that which was lost.” He was not originally known as “the Son of man,” but as “the Son of God.” Before all worlds, He dwelt in the bosom of the Father and “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” But in order to redeem men, the Son of the Highest became “the Son of man.” He was born of the Virgin, and by birth inherited the innocent infirmities of our nature, and bore the sufferings incident to those infirmities. Then did He also take upon Himself our sin and its penalty and therefore died upon the cross.

He was in all points made like unto His brethren. He could not be the shepherd of men without becoming like to them and therefore the Word condescended to be made flesh. Behold the stupendous miracle of incarnation! Nothing can excel this marvel—Immanuel, God with us! “Being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” O lost one, conscious of your loss, take heart today when the name of Jesus is named in your hearing. He is God, but He is man, and as God and man He saves His people from their sins.

Next to this, to show how Jesus values one lost soul, *He makes a very wonderful descent.* “The Son of man is come.” He was always known as “The Coming One.” But as to the salvation of the lost He has actually come. For judgment He is “the Coming One” still. But for salvation we rejoice that our Savior has already come. Quitting the assemblies of the perfect, He has been here as the Friend of publicans and sinners. From being the Lord of angels, He has stooped to be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Yes, He has come, and not in vain. Those who preached the coming Savior had such a joyous message to deliver that their feet were beautiful upon the mountains and their voices were as heavenly music.

But as for us who preach that He has come, and coming He has finished the work which He undertook to perform—surely ours is the choicest of messages. Our Lord Jesus has completed the atoning sacrifice and the justifying righteousness by which lost men are saved—happy is the preacher of such tidings and blessed are your ears that hear them! The good Shepherd has performed all that is necessary for the salvation of the flock which His Father has given into his hands.

Beloved, let us take heart. Lost as we are, Christ has come to save us. He has come to the place of our ruin and woe. His coming and seeking will not be in vain. Brethren, how greatly ought we to value the souls of men when Jesus for their sake becomes a man and comes into this sinful world among our guilty race that He may work the salvation of the lost!

Note, here, that *He does this for those that are still straying*. I have marked, in looking at the Greek text, that it is written, “He seeketh that which goeth astray.” The Shepherd seeks while the sheep strays—seeks it because it strays and needs seeking. Full many of the Lord’s redeemed are even now going astray and even now is the Shepherd going after them. The Savior seeks those who are even now sinning. That He should have a love to those who are repenting I can well understand. But that He should care for those who are willfully going astray is far more gracious. Jesus seeks those whose backs are towards Him, who are going further and further away from the fold. Herein is grace most free, most full, most sovereign.

Indeed, it is so. Though you harden yourself against the Lord, though you refuse to turn at His rebuke, yet if you are His redeemed, His eye of love marks you. In all your willful wanderings He follows you. He sees you, He seeks you! Oh that you may yield and find that He saves you! O you that are now in the flock, think of the love of Christ to you when you were outside the fold. When you had no wish to return. When, seeing Him pursuing you, you only ran faster to escape His almighty love! Let us sing together,

*“Determined to save,
He watched o’er my path,
When, Satan’s blind slave,
I sported with death.”*

Notwithstanding all my rebellion and all my willful transgression, He still loved me with His heart and pursued me with His Word. Oh, how we ought to love sinners, since Jesus loved us and died for us while we were yet sinners! We must care for drunkards while they still pass round the cup. Swearers even while we hear them swear. And profligates while we mourn to see them polluting our midnight streets. We must not wait till we see some better thing in them, but feel an intense interest for them as what they are—straying and lost. When the sheep is torn with the thorns of the waste places, and is sick, and worn to skin and bones with long wanderings and hungerings, we must seek its restoration—though we see in it no desire to submit itself to the Shepherd’s care and rule. Such was our Savior’s love to us—such be our love to lost ones.

The shepherd takes a peculiar interest in the lost—not only as now straying—but as *having already gone very far away*. Carefully consider these words—“If so be that he find it.” That “if” tells its own tale. The sheep had become so terribly lost that it was not likely to be found again—it had wandered into so dense a thicket, or strayed into so wild a region that it seemed scarcely within the bounds of hope that it would ever be discovered and brought back. We do not often meet with an “if” in reference to the work of Christ. But here is one—“If so be that he find it.” This does not show weakness in the Shepherd, but the desperate danger of the sheep.

I have often heard it said by those who come to confess Christ and to acknowledge His love to them, that they are struck with wonder that they, above all others, should be doing any such thing. When we sit at the Lord’s table the feast is very wonderful, but the greatest wonder is the guest, when I am there. How humbly do we each one sing,

*“Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter where there’s room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?”*

But it is so. The good Shepherd is today seeking many, whose salvation seems highly improbable, if not utterly impossible. Herein is love that He should go after those whose finding is by no means a certainty, nor even a probability! Very improbable, almost impossible, is the task He undertakes! Yet in such He takes a deep interest.

Moreover, those toward whom our Lord has these thoughts of love have often sinned so as to have *brought themselves into the deadliest danger*. “For the Son of man is come *to save* that which was lost.” Saving implies ruin, peril, jeopardy—yea, destruction already in a measure present. Are not many now playing with the fire of hell? For what is that unquenchable fire but sin, in its nature and results? Men are trifling on the brink of eternal woe, “Their foot shall slide in due time.” Playing with edged tools is nothing in danger compared with sporting with your lusts, and many are doing so.

Yet, despite their danger, Jesus seeks them. See you not those sheep heedlessly feeding near the den of the wolf? In a little while the monster will devour them. They are far away from home, and food, and rest, and safety. They have no desire to return, but they are resolved to roam yet further from the fold. The Lord Jesus comes after such desperately deluded ones. Until you pass the iron gate, the Gospel will invite you to return. If you are but one inch this side of hell, love will pursue you and mercy will follow you.

Our glorious David, while a lamb still lives, is able to rescue it from the jaw of the lion and the paw of the bear. Though, like Jonah, a soul may have descended into the deeps and may lie out of all human reach, yet a word from Jesus can bring it up from the lowest pit. Glory be to the blessed name of the Almighty Savior, He is able to save to the uttermost—His power to save the lost is such that none are too vile for His salvation!

If we rightly consider the parable before us, we shall see that *He takes a special interest in these stray sheep because they are His own*. This man did not go after wild beasts, nor after other men’s sheep. But he had a hundred sheep of his own and when he had counted them, he missed one. The hireling, whose own the sheep are not, would have said, “We have nearly the hundred—we need not be particular about an odd one.”

But these hundred sheep belonged to the Shepherd Himself. They were His own by choice, by inheritance, by divine gift, by glorious capture, and by costly purchase, and He could not accept ninety and nine for a hundred. “None of them is lost,” says He. “Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Jesus could not endure to report a loss upon the flock handed over to Him of the Father. Ninety-nine is not a hundred, and the Savior will not consider it such. For well He knows that, “It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” Dear friends, since Jesus takes such an interest even in one stray soul, you must not think it little that you should be called to care for a single soul. Do not think that a little congregation of forty or fifty is too few to be worthy of your best efforts. Should your class, through various circumstances, get down to a very small number, do not, therefore, give it up. No, no! Value one soul more than a world’s purchase. The full company of the redeemed is far from being made up as yet and the Lord has much people in this city not yet brought to His feet. Therefore, never dream of ceasing your labors. Rest not till the hour shall come,

*“When all the chosen race
Shall meet around the throne;
Shall bless the conduct of His grace,
And make His glories known.”*

II. Secondly, may the Spirit of God help me while I remind you that OUR LORD PUT FORTH SPECIAL EXERTION TO SAVE ONE SOLITARY INDIVIDUAL.

Observe in the parable—for it is a parable, though briefly told—that we see the Shepherd *leaving happier cares*. He felt himself at home with His attached and faithful flock. They had not gone astray and they gathered about Him, and He fed them, and took pleasure in them. There is always a great deal to do with sheep—they have many diseases, many weaknesses, many needs. But when you have an attached, affectionate flock about you, you feel at home with them. So the Great shepherd describes

Himself as leaving the ninety and nine, His choice flock, the sheep that had fellowship with Him and He with them.

Yes, he leaves those in whom He could take pleasure, to seek one that gave Him pain. I will not dwell upon how He left the paradise above, and all the joy of His Father's house, and came to this bleak world, but I pray you remember that He did so. It was a wonderful descent when He came from beyond the stars to dwell on this beclouded globe to redeem the sons of men. But, remember, He still continually comes by His Spirit. His errands of mercy are perpetual. The Spirit of God moves His ministers, who are Christ's representatives, to forego the feeding of the gathered flock and to seek, in their discourses, the salvation of the wandering ones, in whose character and behavior there is nothing to cheer us.

My Master's heart is full of care for all that love Him. He wears their names engraven on the jewels of His breastplate. But yet His heart is always going forth afar, after those who have not yet been brought to Him. And after those who once were in His fold but have gone aside, and quitted the flock. He leaves the happy and the holy, and gives His best thoughts to the lost.

Our Lord *goes out to seek these*. It is not merely a sending forth of thought—it is a marching forth of power. His divine grace is going forth, I trust, this day beyond the company whom He has called by His grace, to those other sheep, who are not yet of His fold, whom also He must bring in. He would not have His church expend all her care on the flock which He has led into her green pastures, but He would have her go afield after those who are not yet in her blest society.

According to the text, the Shepherd goes into the mountains—among difficulties and dangers. He will do and dare for the saving of the lost—no hardships can daunt His mighty love. You know through what dark ravines He passed in saving men. You have heard what climbing He had after proud souls and what condescension for despairing ones. A sheep in the East is more light of foot than our sheep. It will leap like a gazelle and climb the mountains like a chamois. And so are sinners very swift in transgression and very daring in presumption. They leap in their iniquities where the children of God would shudder to follow them even in thought. They make nothing of leaps of profanity which would curdle the blood of him that has been taught the fear of God at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Yet the Lord Jesus went after these desperadoes. What difficulties He conquered, what sufferings He endured, what mountains He overleaped, that He might seek and save! O brethren, the same heart is in Him still—He goes forth continually in the preaching of the Word. With many a sigh and many a groan on the part of His chosen ministers, He goes among the mountains to seek that which has gone astray. I pray that He may accept the effort of His unworthy servant this day and bring some lost one home by means of this sermon.

To show His exertion for the lost, our Lord describes Himself as *seeking with persevering diligence*. He looks this way, but sees nothing. He shades His eyes with His hand and looks steadily! He thought He saw His sheep. There is surely a living object upon the hillside! He gazes intently. No, it does not stir—it is a white rock! Possibly the lost sheep is in yonder gully! It is a long way to go but He is so intent on His purpose that He is soon there. But the sheep is not to be seen. Where can it be?

He travels on with swift foot, for He does not know what may become of His sheep while He delays. Every now and then He stops—He thinks He hears a bleating. Surely it is the voice of His sheep! He is mistaken. His love makes His ear the father of sounds which are not sounds at all. He has neither seen nor heard it these long hours.

But He will continue seeking till He finds it. The concentrated omniscience of Christ is set upon a soul that goes astray, looking after it in all its evil desires and evil emotions—watching the growth of anything that looks like repentance—and observing with sorrow the hardening of its heart. This is what our Lord is doing for those redeemed with His blood, who as yet have not been carried back to the fold. He puts forth a gracious exertion of eye and mind as well as of foot and hand towards His wandering sheep.

At the last He saves—completely saves. He has not come to make the salvation of His people possible, but to save them. He has not come to put them in the way of saving themselves, but to save them. He has not come to half save them, but to save them altogether. When my Lord comes forth in the majesty of His Sovereign grace to save a soul, He achieves His purpose, despite sin, and death, and hell. The wolf may grind his teeth but the shepherd is the wolf's Master. The sheep itself may, for a long time, have wandered and at the last may struggle against Him. But He grips its feet and throws the creature on His shoulders and bears it home, for He is resolved to save it. The sheep is glad to be so borne, for with a touch the Shepherd molds its will to His more perfect will. His grace is the triumphant energy by which the lost one is restored.

The salvation of a single soul is a mass of miracles. I have heard of a fire which consumed the shop of a jeweler, and a number of costly treasures of gold, and silver, and precious stones, were found among the ruins, caked into a conglomerate of riches. What a salvage! Such is the salvation of a single man—it is a mass of priceless mercies melted into one inestimable ingot—dedicated to the praise of the glory of His grace who makes us to be “accepted in the Beloved” and “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

When I think of the energy which is put forth by the Lord to save a single lost soul, I feel stirred in my heart and I desire that your hearts should be stirred also—that we may put forth all our strength to go and find the Lord's lost ones. Let us co-operate with Him in His great labor of seeking that which is lost, Oh, that the Holy Spirit may put such a spirit within us and keep it there!

III. I am compelled to pass onward somewhat hurriedly. Notice, in the third place, that our Lord FEELS A SPECIAL REJOICING AT THE RECOVERY OF A WANDERING SHEEP.

Do not make a mistake here. Do not suppose that our Lord loves the one soul that has wandered more than the ninety and nine who have been preserved by His grace from going astray. Oh, no! He thinks ninety-nine times more of ninety-nine than of one. For His sheep are each one equally precious to Him. We must not suppose that He looks upon any one soul of His redeemed with a tenderness ninety-nine times greater than He gives to another.

But you will see the meaning of the passage by an illustration from your own experience. You have a family and you love all your children alike. But little Johnny is very ill. He has a fever and is likely to die—now you think more of him than of all the rest. He recovers and you bring him downstairs in your arms, and just then he is the dearest child of the whole company. Not that he is really more valued than his brothers and sisters, but the fact that he has been so ill and was likely to die has brought him more before your mind and caused you more anxiety, and therefore you have more joy in him because of his recovery. The great deeps of Christ's love are the same to all His flock, but on the surface there is sometimes a holy storm of joy when any one of them has been newly restored after wandering.

Learn the occasion of this demonstrative joy. The wandering one has caused great sorrow. We were all grieved that our brother should become a gross backslider—that such an earnest Christian as he seemed to be should disgrace his profession. Our Lord is still more grieved than we are. When the erring one comes back, we feel a new joy in him. In proportion to the sorrow felt over the wanderer is the joy manifested when he is restored.

Moreover, great apprehensions were aroused. We feared that he was not the Lord's and that he would go back unto perdition. We trembled for him. That black dread is all over now—the sheep is safe—the doubtful one is saved and restored to the fold. In proportion to the weight of the apprehension is the intensity of the relief.

The Shepherd had exercised also great labor over the lost one. He went up among the mountains to find His sheep. But now His labor is fully rewarded, for He has found His lost sheep. He remembers no more His travel and travail for joy that the sheep is safe.

Besides, in this newly-restored one, *there are marks of salvation which cause joy.* He has been torn with the briars, but he is resting now. See how he lies down in the tender grass! He was weary and worn,

and almost dead with his wanderings. But now, how happy he is in the presence of his Shepherd! How closely he keeps to his Shepherd's footsteps! All this goes to make the Shepherd glad!

The Shepherd rejoices when He brings back the lost sheep because *He makes that rescue an occasion and opportunity for having a special gala day*. He wishes all His sheep to learn His delight in them all by seeing His delight in one. I know it is so in the church. I bless the Lord when He keeps the feet of His saints—I bless Him every day for preserving grace. But when some grievous wanderer is restored, then we bless Him more emphatically. Then we have music and dancing. The elder brother wonders what these overflowing joys can mean, but everybody else can see good reason for special mirth when the lost one is found.

Shepherds and their flocks cannot have holiday every day. But when a lost one has been recovered, they feel such mutual delight in each other, and such a common delight in the saving of the lost that they seize upon the occasion for rejoicing. I want you all to recognize that. If you love the church of Christ you are bound to keep a feast day when fallen ones are raised up. And that you may hold that festival, you are bound to put out all your strength to bring in the lost one.

IV. Now we come to the tug-of-war, that is, to look upon our divine Shepherd as HE SETS US A STRIKING EXAMPLE.

We may view this text *as our personal missionary warrant*. Today we are called upon to think of missions, and as I think it idle to preach about missions in a big high-flying style, I have purposed to say something commonplace, but practical. Brethren, we are all of us to be missionaries for Christ and the text presents a warrant for each one to work earnestly as a soul-winner.

What shall we do, then, to imitate our Lord? The answer is—Let us *go after one* soul. I cannot make a selection for you this morning, but I entreat all who are workers together with God to go after the ones. There is a kind of knack in speaking to individuals—everybody does not possess it, but every believer should labor to acquire it. Seek the souls of men one by one. It is far easier work to me to speak to you all than it would be to take each one apart and speak to him personally of his soul. And yet such speaking to you one by one might be more successful than this sermon to you in the mass. I entreat you, as the great Shepherd goes after one, do not think you will demean yourself by going after one poor man, or woman, or child. But do it now.

Listen again—*let that one be somebody that is quite out of the way*. Try and think of one who has grievously gone astray. It may be there is one such in your family, or you meet with one such in the course of trade. Think carefully of that one soul and reflect upon its sin and danger. You would like to pick out a hopeful case, in order that you might feel sure of success. Take another course this time—seek the one which is going astray and seems hopeless. Follow your Lord's example and go after one who is the least likely to be found. Will you try this plan? If you do not, you will be quitting the way of your Lord.

“I have a class and a work,” one says. Yes, I want you for a little while to *leave the ninety and nine*. I pray that you may feel called to look after some one greatly depraved person, or some utterly neglected child. Keep up your ninety-and-nine class, if you possibly can, but at all hazards, go after the one. Make an unusual effort—go out of your way. Let ordinary service be placed second for the time being. It will be a healthy change for you and perhaps, a great relief. Peradventure, you will come back and do more good with the ninety and nine after you have been away a little while with the straying one. You are getting a little moldy, and you are just a wee tired of the monotony of your work.

Every Sunday the same girls, or the same boys, and the same form of lesson. Well, cut the whole concern for a little and go after the one sheep that has gone astray. “You are giving us odd advice, Mr. Spurgeon.” If it is not in my text, then do not follow it. But if it is in our dear Master's words, I trust you will carry it out bravely.

When you go after that one, *have all your wits about you*. Go and seek—and that you cannot do unless you are alert. Follow up the straying one. Did you say that you would wait till he called at your

house? Is that your notion of seeking lost sheep? Is that the way of sportsmen in the autumn? Do they sit in the drawing room till the pheasants fly by the window? That would be poor sport.

***“O come, let us go and find them,
In the paths of death they roam.”***

Go after them, for so our shepherd did. He braved the mountain’s slippery side. I do not suppose the shepherd had any greater love for mountain tracks than you have, but up the rough tracks He climbed, for the sheep’s sake. Go after sinners into their poverty and wretchedness, until you find them.

Here is one thing to cheer you. If you should win such a soul as that, *you will have more joy, a great deal, than in saving those for whom you regularly labor*—more joy over that lost one than over the ninety and nine hopeful ones. It will be such a support to your faith, such a boost for your joy, such a bright light to your labor to have won such a specially guilty one. I should not wonder but what you will talk about it for many a day, and it will be a source of strength to you when things are not quite as you would desire. Such converts are our crown of rejoicing. May I especially recommend that you make a trial of this extra sheep-seeking? If you do not succeed, you will have done no harm, for you will have copied your Lord and Master. But you will succeed, for He is with you, and His Spirit works by you.

I would remind you that, *even under the old law, you would be bound to do this thing*. Turn to the twenty-third chapter of Exodus and read the fourth and fifth verses. “If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.” You are bound to do good even to your enemy. Will you not serve your best friend? If your enemy’s ox or ass needed to be taken back to him, you are bound to do it. How much more when the sheep belongs to Him whom you love with all your heart! Prove your love to Jesus by laboring to take Him back His strays!

Turn to the twenty-second of Deuteronomy, first to fourth verses, and there you will find another bit of the law. “Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother.” Oh, will you not bring in the stray sheep of your greater Brother, “the first-born among many brethren”? “And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again.”

If you cannot get a soul to Christ, at any rate get it to yourself. If you cannot lead it immediately to conversion, show it some hospitality within your own doors by ministering such comfort as you can. Do what you can to cheer the poor heart till Christ comes after it. “Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.”

How easy it is to *hide ourselves*! That is the expression used by Moses—“thou shalt not hide thyself from them.” When you know that people are very wicked, the usual plan is to wish them well, but keep out of their way. Prudence makes you hide yourself from them. The whole street may swarm with harlots, but then you have gone to bed and the door is shut. What has their sin to do with you? There are many drunken men about. But you do not drink to excess—what has their drinking to do with you? That is what is meant by hiding ourselves from them. How easily that can be done!

Take an illustration which is worth the telling. A vessel, the other day, was crossing the Atlantic, and it fell in with that disabled emigrant ship, *The Danmark*. Suppose the captain had kept on his course. He might have looked another way and resolved not to be detained. He might have argued, “I am bound to do the best for my owners. It will hinder me greatly if I go pottering about after this vessel. I had better go by and not see it, or make haste to port and send out help.”

It could have been done and nobody would have been the wiser, for the ship would have gone down soon. The captain of that vessel was a man of a nobler breed. He did not hide himself, nor turn the blind eye towards the vessel in distress. But what did the captain do? All honor to him, he came near and took the ship in tow. This was not all—he found that she could not keep afloat and he resolved to take those

hundreds of emigrants on board his own ship. But he could not carry them and his cargo, too. What then?

The decision was greatly to his honor. Overboard goes the cargo! God's blessing rest on the man! Into the sea went the freight, and the passengers were taken on board and carried to the nearest port. He could have easily hidden himself, could he not? So can you, you Christian people, as you call yourselves. Can you go through this world and always have a blind eye to the case of lost sinners? Can you come in and out of this Tabernacle and never speak to the strangers who throng these aisles? Will you let them go to hell unwarned and uninstructed? Can you hide yourselves from them! How dare you call yourselves Christians! How will you answer for it at last? Brothers, Sisters, let us shake off this inhuman indifference and deny ourselves rest, ease, credit—that we may save poor sinking souls. Overboard with cargo cheerfully that you may, in the power of the Holy Ghost, save souls from death.

Once more—this text is *the great missionary warrant for all the church of God*. We are to go, as the Savior did, to seek and to save that which was lost. And we are to do this not on account of the numbers of the heathen, but for one of them. I grant you there is a great power in the argument of numbers—so many hundreds of millions in China—so many hundreds of millions in India. But if there were only one person left unsaved in any part of the world, it would be worth while for the entire Christian church to go after that one person! For He who is greater than the church, as the Bridegroom is greater than the bride, quitted heaven—ay, and quitted the sweet society of His own beloved, that He might go after the one that had gone astray.

Do not care, therefore, about numbers—save the smallest tribes. Have an eye to the hamlets in England. I believe that the scattered cottages of our land are in a worse condition than the villages. Care for the ones. Your Lord did so, and here is your warrant for doing the like.

Next, notice that we ought never to be moved by the supposed superiority of a race. I have heard it said that it would be far better to try and convert the superior races than to consider the more degraded. Is it not better to bring in the educated Brahmins than the wild hill-tribes? “What a fine sort of people these are, these philosophical Hindus! If we could win them they would be worth converting!”

That is not at all according to the mind of Christ. The shepherd sought a lost sheep and when He had found it, it was no great spoil for Him for it was so worn out as to be nothing but a destroyed sheep. Yet He went after that one poor animal. Let us feel that the degraded Africans, the dwarfs of the woods, the cannibals of New Guinea, and all such are to be sought quite as much as more advanced races. They are men. That is enough.

Once more—the motive for missionary enterprise must never be the excellence of the character of the individuals. The shepherd did not go after the sheep because it never went astray, nor because it was docile, but because it did go astray and was not docile. The sin of men is their claim upon the church of God. The more sin, the more reason for abounding grace. Oh that the church would feel it to be her duty, if not to go to the most degraded first, yet not to leave them to the last! Where you seem least likely to succeed, there go at once—for there you will find room for faith, and where there is room for faith, and faith fills the room, God will send a blessing.

Dear friends, as you cannot, all of you, go abroad to the heathen—though some of you ought to do so—I ask you to do what you can do. Contribute to the collection which is for the support of mission work. Here is a small opportunity, and if you do not avail yourselves of it, you are not likely to do the greater thing to which I have invited you. The Lord bless you! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 18

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—9387, 428, 291

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.