

1. We Are All Absolutely Lost and Absolutely Powerless

a. SHEEP

i. We're are called sheep a lot in Scripture

ii. "Pastor" means "shepherd"

1. Elders were called to "shepherd" the flock of God (Acts 20:28ff; 1 Pet 5) and to "keep watch" for wolves who desire to lead sheep astray

2. Peter was told by Jesus to "Feed my lambs" if he really loved Jesus

iii. The Pharisees probably related to the shepherds in the story first

1. Jesus is telling them that they need to shepherd with the values and priorities that Heaven has – joy at sinners' repentance

b. Sheep endanger themselves looking for food

i. "Lost" is the word for "ruin"

1. This means that there is a lostness to a sheep that is for its certain ruin and destruction

2. This "lostness" is not merely geographical, but is even more about certain and imminent danger of death because it is away from good food and secure protection by the shepherd

a. Its separation from the shepherd and the flock has made it vulnerable and doomed

ii. Sheep wander off following their stomachs

1. Sheep are short-sighted, engrossed in the tyranny of the immediate

a. They will eat poisonous plants...more than once

b. They will put themselves in foolish and dangerous positions in order to get food

2. How are we like this?

a. We become engrossed in ourselves, thoughtlessly pursuing things that we believe will satisfy our souls

b. We end up in precarious positions in life because we pursued good things too zealously or pursued poor things believing that they would satisfy us

3. Do we not believe that some other food than the word of God will feed our souls?

a. Some romantic relationship?

b. Some academic achievement?

c. Some career/paycheck?

d. It's not that these things are bad, but rather that we think they are soul fulfilling in a way that leads us to pursue them over cliffs, to fill our soul's stomach with food that is not nutritionally life-giving

iii. Sheep can't find their way home

1. Sheep are ignorant and stupid

2. Sheep will get stuck in fences trying to get grass, fall off of cliffs trying to get grass, etc.

a. Malpass sheep, "flooded" field and crowded sheep in the "high ground"

b. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, believing that our way is not merely sufficient, but the best way *for us*

3. As Westerners, we believe that we're all shepherds and can find our own way home

a. We hate the idea that we are utterly helpless

b. We think that we just need a shepherd every once in a while to show us the way home

c. Sinners Must be Absolutely Rescued

i. Carries the sheep home

1. Sheep don't follow very well, so often they must be thrown down, bound up, and carried

2. In fact, in flocks, sheep will spook and just follow the first head to move, making flocking sporadic and epileptic

3. Stormy follows Grace around, but a sheep won't follow you, you have to carry it
- ii. We're more like sheep than dogs, and frankly who wants to be called even a dog?
- iii. This shows us that, like sheep, we contribute nothing but stubborn ignorance, foolishness, helplessness, and endangerment to our salvation
 1. "You contribute nothing to your salvation but the sin which made it necessary." – Jonathan Edwards
 2. ALL our rescue comes from the shepherd (searched, found, cast down, carried)
- iv. Sheep and coins must be *found*
 1. This is the doctrine of original sin: everyone is absolutely lost in sin
 2. This doctrine clashes with the common "enlightened" view of humanity, that humans are born innocent are somehow ruined by their nurturing
 - a. Frankly, it's repulsive to our society and the largest obstacle to faith in Jesus today
 - b. Consider: most people have no problem with believing God loves them (of course He should, I love me, too!), but when the Christian faith proclaims that we are utterly lost, absolutely evil, hopeless, born sinful, cannot save ourselves in any way – that, they say, is repulsive!
 3. Yet, with all the failures of our enlightened endeavors over the past 200 years, we all know that this idea that we are inherently good is wrong!
 - a. We live in a schizophrenic society where we proclaim that humanity is good, yet the facts bear out day after day that the doctrine of original sin and pervasive depravity of the human soul best explains the world around us
 - i. Blaise Pascal, "...but for this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we remain incomprehensible to ourselves."
 - b. "We don't believe that everybody is totally lost", but these same people are attempting at great lengths to increase legislation and interventions to restrain human behavior and even the human heart.
 - i. G.K. Chesterton, "Only with original sin can we both pity the beggar and distrust the king."
 - ii. Think about it: If humanity is inherently good and only social intervention makes it evil, then what is the solution?
 1. Change society – but who trusts the change-makers if society makes us evil to begin with?
 2. If we reject the doctrine of original sin and total depravity, we have no right to distrust the king and no reason to pity the beggar.
 4. Jesus is showing that rescue is necessary

2. God Rejoices to Absolutely Rescue Absolute Sinners

- a. Heaven values repentance
- b. This joy is communal
 - i. "gathers friends and neighbors" to share in the joy
 - ii. Joy is complete when it is shared with others who also rejoice because of shared values
 1. The shepherd's friends and neighbors rejoice
 2. The woman's friends rejoice
 3. The angels of God rejoice when God rescues a sinner and brings it home
 - iii. The grace of God creates a community on earth that is a reflection of the community in heaven!
 1. What is a community?
 2. A community is a group of people bonded into one-minded cohesion through an intense experience that defines their reality
 - a. Consider: Those who have lost loved ones through shared tragedy (Twin Towers, MH370, military war).

- ii. So, in the gospel, we affirm both the doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of irresistible grace
 - 1. I am a sheep with no power, contributing nothing to my salvation but need!
 - 2. I am deeply valued, the sheep whom God left the 99 to find me, the coin which He lit the lamp and swept the floor to hold me again
 - 3. I am deeply broken and sinful AND I am deeply loved and treasured!
- iii. Consider the love of the God who delights in such sheep!
 - 1. How great is His love? How powerful to rescue and to restore! How certain to purify, sweep clean, and bring all the way home?!
 - 2. How shall you respond to such pursuing gracious love? Shall we not entrust ourselves to Him completely?!

4. REPENTANCE: The Only Response of a Sinner to God's Pursuit!

- a. Both sheep and coins need to be flipped over, turned upside down before they are picked up
 - i. When we see that Jesus pursues us for our good, to rescue us at the cost of his own life, through his own great suffering, we can come undone
 - ii. Our system of salvation must be flipped over: To Repent means to stop trusting that your wisdom will figure it out, your obedience is good enough, or that your efforts in any way will make you right with God
 - iii. It is, instead, to lay your works on their backs, contributing nothing to your salvation, but solely to trust in Jesus to pick you up, lay you on His cross-bearing shoulders, and carry you home
 - iv. Repentance is the lifestyle that brings joy in heaven, not merely the entrance party!
- b. Repentance comes when we see the holiness of God (need for rescue) and love of God (His passionate pursuit to rescue us)!
- c. Sinners and Tax Collectors ate with Jesus because they saw His mercy and knew that they needed it and that He graciously pursued them.
 - i. Romans 2:4 – “God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance”
 - ii. His kindness is only fully understood in the light of His infinite holiness and our infinite sin, but it is not His holiness that leads us to repentance, but His kindness in the light of it!
 - iii. And repentance leads to joy! (2 Cor 7:9)
- d. How deep does the kindness of God go?
 - i. GOSPEL OF THE CROSS
 - ii. Every other kindness is good, but the kindness of the infinite Son of God humbling Himself to die my death, to pay down my infinite sin debt, to give me His blessings of righteousness because He is so gracious?!
 - iii. Now what intense experience binds you to Him and to each other but the holy and gracious Jesus Christ who rescues sinners with His own blood and powerful life?!

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who not only carried us home, but bore our iniquities as He carried us: Isaiah 53:6 – “all we like sheep have gone astray, each to his own way, and He laid upon Him the iniquities of us all.” The Shepherd was consumed as a sheep, slaughtered in our place: Isaiah 53:7 – “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

Heaven rejoices in repentance. This shows the value system of heaven. God's servants celebrate acknowledged weakness and need in sinners. His ministers exult when the powerless call upon Jesus for rescue. God rejoices. God dances over you. He sends His Son to find, to flip, and to rescue. The Almighty maker of all things passionately flies to rescue the powerless and dances over them with joy.