

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OUR GREAT SHEPHERD FINDING THE SHEEP.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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"Until he find it. . . . And when he hath found it. . . . And when he cometh home."—Luke xv. 4, 5, 6.

THE love of Jesus, the Great Shepherd, is very *practical* and active. There is a sheep lost, and the Lord regrets it; but his love does not spend itself in regrets; he arises, and goes forth to seek and to save that which was lost. The love of Jesus Christ is love not in word only, but in deed and in truth. The love of Jesus is *prevenient*. He does not wait until the sheep is willing to return, or until it makes some attempt to come back; but no sooner is its lost estate known to the Shepherd than he starts off, that he may find that which was lost. The love of Jesus to the lost sheep is *pre-eminent*. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasturage; and for a while forgets them, that all his heart, his eye, his strength may be given to the one that has gone astray. O sweet love of Christ, so practical, so pre-eminent, so prevenient! Let us ask for grace that we may imitate it, especially those of us who are called to be shepherds of men.

Among God's people most of the saints have a charge to watch over. However little the flock may be, even if it be restricted to our own family, or to the little class that gathers about us on the Sabbath, yet we are all our brother's keeper in some measure. Let us learn the love of Christ, that we may be wise in shepherdry. Let us not talk about our friends, and say we love them; but let us show it by earnest, personal, speedy endeavours to do them good. Let us not wait until we see some goodness in them—until they seek after instruction. But

"Oh, come, let us go and find them,
In the paths of death they roam."

And long before they have a thought of coming home, let us be on their track, eager to grasp them, if by any means we may save some. Oh, to have in our hearts such love of souls that it engrosses us so that we forget earthly needs, and only remember this yet higher

necessity! It is a good house, said St. Bernard, in which Martha has to complain of Mary—where gracious pursuits put other work in the background. It is a choice crime that men should even grow lax about their lower business for a while, that they may devote their chief energy to the saving of the lost sheep.

Let that stand as an introduction. May we see the love of Jesus, as Bernard saw it, and we shall have had sermon enough.

In my text there are three periods to which I call your attention.

I. Christ, the Good Shepherd, first seeks the lost sheep "UNTIL HE FIND IT." Just put a mark under those words. That is our first head—"Until he find it." It is a long reach "Until he find it."

I like the expression. The Lord Jesus did not come down to earth to make an attempt to find men, but he came to do it, and he did it. He tarried here, seeking the lost sheep till he found it: he never gave over till his work was done. At this hour, in his work of grace amongst his chosen, he does not make an attempt at their salvation, and suffer defeat; but he keeps at soul-seeking work until he find it.

Look at the seeking shepherd: he is looking for the sheep. Notice his anxious countenance "until he find it." We read that after he found it he rejoiced; but there is no rejoicing until he find it. He is all excitement, quick of ear to catch the faintest sound, for it may be the bleating of his lost sheep. His eyes are like the eyes of eagles. He saw something stir in the bracken yonder, and he will be there in a bound or two; he is so eager. No: it was a mistake. It was not the sheep; perhaps it was some frightened fox. He climbs a cairn, and from the top of it he looks all around. I was about to say that he looks with ears and eyes together. He puts his whole soul into the organs of watchfulness, if peradventure he may discern the sheep. Is there a smile on his face? Ah, no! not "until he find it." His whole soul is in his eyes and ears until he find it. This is a faint yet true picture of that Great Shepherd who came here to seek his flock. So the evangelists have drawn him in their pen-and-ink sketches of him—always watchful; spending night and day, in prayers, and tears, and entreaties; never more to have a joy until he find the lost one. Then, when he did find a single sheep, finding his meat and his drink in it, and becoming refreshed from the fact that he has so far accomplished his beloved work. The great Shepherd is all energy, care, and concentration of thought concerning his sheep, "until he find it."

There is no hesitating with Jesus. The sheep is lost, and the news is brought to the shepherd; he girds his loose robe about him, and is on the way. He knows within a little which way that stray sheep will go, and he is on its track at once, though he knows that he must mark that track with his blood. See the blessed shepherd pressing on: there is no pausing nor resting "until he find it." He has made up his mind that no sheep of his shall be lost, and he hies over hill and dale after the wanderer until he find it.

If you look into that shepherd's face, there is no trace of anger there. He does not say, "Oh, that I should be worried with this silly sheep thus going astray!" No thought is there but that of anxious love. It is all love, and nothing else but love, before he finds and until he finds it; and you may be sure that careful tenderness will

be in full action after he has found it. He is looking with anxious eye of love. "As I live," saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he should turn unto me and live." "Until he find it" there will be no thought of anxiety, but a fulness of pitying care for the lost sheep.

And, mark, there is no giving up. That sheep has wandered now for many hours. The sun has risen, and the sun has set; or, at least it is just going down; but as long as the shepherd can see, and the sheep is still alive, he will pursue it "until he find it." He has been disappointed a great many times; and when he thought that he should have found it, he has missed it; but still, he will never give it up. He is impelled onward by irresistible love, and he must continue his weary search until he find it. It was precisely so with our Lord Jesus Christ. When he came after you and after me, we ran from him, but he pursued us: we hid from him, but he discovered us: he had almost grasped us, but so long as we eluded him he still pursued with love unwearied until he found us. Oh, if he had given up after the first ten years—if he had ceased to care for some of us after fifty different occasions in which we had choked conscience and quenched the Spirit, then we should have been lost. But he would not be turned away. If he determines to save, he continues to pursue the rambling sheep until he find it. He cannot, he must not, he will not, cease from the work of seeking and of finding till he find it. I wish to-night that the time were come with some here that it should be said, "The Saviour did pursue such and such a one until he found him—found him in the Tabernacle, and ended all his wanderings there—found him standing in yonder gallery, and ended all his wanderings at the 'foot of the cross.'" God grant that it may be so! but whether it be so with you or not, be ye sure of this—that the Lord Jesus has in hundreds and thousands of cases pursued sinners with unflagging mercy, leaping to them over hills of sin, and following them till he has found them. We are now his for ever and ever, for he who has found us will never lose us. Blessed be his name!

Learn this lesson before I pass on. If ever you are seeking the conversion of any man follow him up until you find him. Do not be discouraged. Put up with a great many rebuffs and rebukes: you will have him yet. He is surest to succeed who cannot be put off from his aim. From some it will be necessary to receive a great deal that is most discouraging. Receive it, and say nothing about it; only whisper to yourself, "I might well have put the Great Shepherd off from caring for me, and yet was not so turned aside. If he persevered with me even to the death, I may well persevere as long as I live in seeking and finding a soul. I have heard of wives who have pleaded with God for their husbands twenty years; and yet have seen them converted after all. There are instances in this place in which indefatigable love has followed up ungodly relatives until they have at last been saved by sovereign grace. Persevere with loving entreaties! Till you bury your unsaved ones, do not consider them dead; and do not bury them spiritually till they are dead really. Some are easily baffled. They

have written the death-warrant of their friend by ceasing to pray for him, and yet that death-warrant will never be written in the records of heaven, for their friend will be brought to the Saviour's feet.

"Until he find it." Now nail your colours to the mast. "Until he find it." Go out, ye under-shepherds for Christ. Wear this motto on your right hand. "Until I find it." Live or die, or work or suffer, whether the time be short or long, or the way be smooth or rough, let each one of you be bound to seek a soul "until he find it." You will find it then, even as Christ found you. There I leave that first point.

II. And now we come to the second—"AND WHEN HE HATH FOUND IT." When he has found it, what does he do then? Well, first, *he takes fast hold*. "He layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing." So when he has found it, the first thing is to get a tight grip of it. See him: he has got close up to the sheep. The poor thing is spent, and yet may have strength enough to get away, therefore the shepherd takes good care that he shall not. He grasps his legs and holds him tight. That is what the Lord Jesus does when at last he gets a man broken down under a sense of sin, spent and worn out as to further resistance of divine mercy. Our Lord gets such a grip of the rebel that he will never get away any more. I remember when he laid hold of me. He has never lost his grasp even to this day. But, oh, it was a grasp! Nothing ever gripped my fickle mind like the hand of Christ. When the divine hand, which fixed the foundations of the earth, had fixed itself on me, my wanderings were ended once for all.

The next thing after the fast hold was *the gracious lift*. He lifted this poor sheep up and put it on his shoulders, and there it was with all its weight, carried by powerful shoulders. That is what the Saviour does for poor weary sinners. He carries the weight of their sin, nay the weight of themselves. He takes us just as we are, and instead of driving us back by his law, he carries us home by his love. Instead of urging us to go home, he becomes the great burden-bearer of his redeemed, and bears them on his shoulders. And now you have before you one of the loveliest of portraits that ever imagination can sketch—that great crowned Shepherd of the sheep, King of kings and Lord of lords, bearing on his shoulders, as a burden he delights to carry, the sheep that had gone astray. Oh, I pray God that you may lie on those broad shoulders if you never have been so favoured. The shoulders of omnipotence bearing up our weakness—the mighty Saviour bearing us and all our sin and all our care, and our whole being upon the shoulders of his strength—this is a sight for angels.

And as he thus carries the weight, observe that *the distance is removed*. We read in the next verse, "When he cometh home," but there is nothing said about the road; for somehow our Master has the knack of being at home at once. The sinner may weary himself by twenty years of sin, but in five minutes that may all be gone. It may have taken you fifty years to make yourself such a hell-deserving sinner as you are, but it will not take Jesus fifty ticks of the clock to wash you and make you whiter than snow, and to get you back into the great Father's house. Truth to tell, the Shepherd's redeeming work is done already.

“How dreadful was the hour,
When God our wanderings laid,
And did at once his vengeance pour
Upon our Shepherd’s head!

“How glorious was the grace,
When Christ sustained the stroke!
His life and blood the Shepherd pays,
A ransom for the flock.”

By that redeeming process he brought us near to God.

There is no weary journey back for Shepherd or sheep. He grasps the sheep; he puts it on his shoulders, and they are both back at the fold.

But the particular point I want you to notice is when the great Shepherd gets this burden on his back. We read, “When he hath found it he layeth it upon his shoulders”—with great anxiety? Look to see whether it is so. Nothing of the sort. But is it not, “He layeth it on his shoulders with great weariness”? No. See! See! “He layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing—*rejoicing*.” He does not remember all the weariness that he has had to suffer. He does not think of the folly of his sheep in having lost good pasture, in having involved itself in so much danger, and in costing him so much labour. Not a word is mentioned of it. “He layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing.” He says to himself, “I am glad to carry this burden: happy to carry my lost sheep home.” And oh! I do love to picture to myself at this moment the joy in the heart of the blessed Christ. “For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame.” And now, whenever he gets a lost sheep to carry back—he rejoices. His heart leaps within him. All anxiety is gone. Fulness of delight is upon him. “He layeth it upon his shoulders rejoicing.” I wonder whether the sheep could see that the Shepherd rejoiced. I do not suppose that it could; but it could feel it. There are two ways, you know, of handling a sheep, and the sheep very soon knows which expresses pleasure on its owner’s part; at any rate, I am sure that a dog knows well enough what your movements mean. If you speak angrily to a sheep, and throw it upon your shoulder with indignation, that is one thing; but if you have not a word to say, except it be, “Poor thing, I am glad I have found you,” and you cast it on your shoulders rejoicing, why, sheep as it is, it knows the difference. At any rate, I know that Christ has a way of saving us: oh, so gently, so lovingly, so gleefully, that he makes us happy in being saved. There is a way of turning a penny into stone or into gold according to the way in which you give it to a poor man. You can fling it at him as if he were a dog, and he will be about as grateful to you as a dog, or not so much. But there is a way in which you can say, “I am sorry for your needs. This is all I can afford you now. Take it, and do what you can with it.” Given with a brotherly look, it will be gratefully received, and made the most of. There is much in the manner, as well as in the matter of a gift. The mannerism of Christ is grandly gracious: he saves us rejoicingly. It is a matter of thanksgiving to him when he gets hold of his lost sheep, and gets it on his shoulders. It makes me glad to think that it is so. We

are not saved by a grudging Christ, who seems as if he were weary of us, and must save us out of hand, to get rid of us. He does not act with us as some rude surgeon might do who says, "I will attend to you directly, but I have plenty else to do, and you *gratis* patients are a trouble." Nor does he roughly set the bone. No; Jesus comes, and, as with a lady's dainty hand, he moulds the dislocated joint; and when he sets it, there is bliss even about the method of the setting. We look into his face, and we see that he puts his tenderest sympathy into each movement. You know the different ways which workmen have. Some kind of work a man is soon sick of. The principle of division of labour is a very admirable one for the production of results upon a large scale; but it is a miserable business for the workman to have to do the same thing over and over again, all day long, as if he were an automaton. Get a man at work at a statue—an artist whose whole soul is in his chisel, who knows that there is a bright spirit within that block of marble, and who means to chip off all that hides the lovely image from his sight. See how he works! No man does a thing well who does it sorrowfully. The best work that can be, is done by the happy, joyful workman; and so it is with Christ. He does not save souls as of necessity—as though he would rather do something else if he might; but his very heart is in it, he rejoices to do it, and therefore he does it thoroughly, and he communicates his joy to us in the doing of it.

Now, learn a lesson before I go away to the third point. "When he hath found it." Suppose that any of you should very soon meet with a poor troubled sinner, anxious to come to Christ. When you have found him, let me recommend you to imitate the Master's example: get a tight grip of him. Do not let him slip. Get a hold of him; and then, if he is in trouble, take all that trouble upon yourself. Try whether you cannot get him upon your shoulders. Imitate your Master in that way. Try to bear all his burden for him, as Christ bore yours. Conduct him to the Christ who is the true burden-bearer; and all the while be very happy about it. I do not think we ought to go and talk to young converts in a dreadfully solemn tone, as though it would be something horrible to find a Saviour. They will never come again, you may depend upon it. They will give you a wide berth. But just go, and in a joyful spirit say, "I am so glad to find you caring about your soul." The best thing that can happen to a soul-seeker is to meet with a troubled conscience; show that you think so. "But," say you, "I have not the time." Always have time, even in the middle of the night, to see a poor conscience-stricken sinner. But perhaps you are very weary, or not well. If I were weary I should not be weary any longer when I came across a lost sheep; and if I were ill, I would get well on purpose to see after a sin-sick sinner. Talk in that way, with sweet and pleasant encouragement, for this is the way to help your brother sinner to the Saviour.

My time has gone, but just a few words more on this last point.

III. "WHEN HE COMETH HOME." "When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

Some hurried observations. First, *heaven is a home*. "When he cometh home"; and the next verse says that it is heaven. Heaven is a home. Do you not like to think of it under that aspect? It is the home of Jesus; and if it is the home of Jesus can any other home be equal to it? "When he cometh home."

Note, next, that *lost ones are known in heaven*. I give you that thought more from the Greek than from the English here. "When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep—the lost one." That is how it should run. It is as if the friends knew that one had been lost, and the loss had been deplored: and the shepherd says, "I have found my sheep: you know which one—the lost one." Up there they know which are Christ's sheep, and which are lost. Heaven is nearer earth than some of us dream. How long does it take to get there?

"One gentle sigh the spirit breaks:
We scarce can say, 'He's gone,'
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Its mansion near the throne."

And there are more communications between earth and heaven than some folk dream; for here it is clear that when the shepherd came home he said to them, "I have found the sheep," the lost one. So they knew all about it. It is evident, again, that they all knew there that the shepherd had gone after the sheep, for he says, "I have found my sheep which was lost." They all knew that he had gone on search, and therefore they could all understand his joy when he came back with the sheep. I believe that they know in heaven when Christ is seeking after anyone. It must be a great satisfaction to some up there who die with an unconverted son, or an unconverted girl, to know, after a little while, son or daughter is converted to Christ. I am persuaded they know it. They cannot help knowing it, because they are Christ's friends and neighbours, and, according to the parable, he tells them, and he says to them, "Rejoice with me"; and if he says, "Rejoice with me," why, of course, he tells them why. You don't think that Jesus ever invited a spirit before the throne to rejoice with him, and received for answer, "I cannot do it, for I know no cause for joy." If I had been converted after my mother's death, I can fancy that when Jesus said to all of them, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep, the lost one," my mother would say, "My Lord, I can rejoice more than any of them, for that was my boy, and he is saved at last." Your mother in glory will be twice glorified to-night, John, if you give your heart to Christ; and I pray that you may. Your father, now before the throne, will think that paradise has grown more paradisiac than ever if he hears it whispered down the golden streets that the wanderer has come home.

Notice, next, very briefly, that *Jesus Christ loves other people to rejoice with him*, so that, when he finds a sinner, he has so much love in his heart that his joy runs over, and he cries to others, "Come, friends, come neighbours, come and help me to be glad, for I have saved

another soul." Let us catch the blessed infection. If you have just heard of somebody being saved, be glad about it. Though you do not know the person, yet be glad about it, because Jesus is glad.

Notice, next, that *repentance is regarded as coming home*. This sheep was not in heaven. No, but as soon as it had been brought into the fold it is described as repenting; and Jesus and the angels begin to rejoice over it. If a man truly repents, and Christ saves him, it is clear that he never will be lost. A certain old proverb forbids us to count our chickens till they are hatched; and I do not think that angels would do so in the case of immortal souls. If they believed that repenting sinners might afterwards be lost, they would not ring the marriage bells just yet, but they would wait a while to see how things went on. If they can yet perish there is not one convert that the angels dare rejoice over; for if any child of God might fall away and perish, why not every one of us? If any one falls from grace, I fear I shall. O my brother, do you not fear the same for yourself? "No," say you, "I don't think so." Well, then, you are a proud fellow, and you are the most likely one to desert your Lord. If ever a sheep of Christ's shall fall away, I shall. I see more of my own tendencies to wander, and more of my own temptations to offend than I do of yours. I would not have the angels rejoice over a man because he repents, if repentance be only a sign of human improvement, and not a token of heavenly love. I would say, "Stop, ye angels; for this man may go back, and perish after all, if, according to the modern gospel Christ loves to-day and hates to-morrow, and a child of God may yet be a child of the devil." I do not believe a word of such doctrine. I believe that where the Lord begins the good work of grace he will carry it on, and perfect it; and when the Lord has once given to a man to know him, he will see that he is preserved in that knowledge for ever. There is a text that clenches it: "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Now, if they have eternal life, it cannot come to an end; for eternal life is eternal, evidently; and if they have eternal life, the Shepherd and his friends may justifiably sing when one single possessor of that eternal life is brought to life and salvation. In the penitent man a work is done that never can be undone; and he is put where he never can be lost. Yes,

"I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
Are the glorified spirits in heaven."

Sing away, angels! There is something to sing about now; and we will join with you in blessing and praising the unchanging God for ever and for ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—421, 257, 373.