

How the Lost Sheep Was Found

by John Nelson Darby

The speaker shares the gospel message with a dying boy, using the boy's story of losing and finding a sheep to explain the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15, and the boy accepts Christ as his Saviour.

Scripture: Luke 15:4

Topics: "The Good Shepherd", "Salvation"

Description

John Nelson Darby shares a poignant account of visiting a dying boy in Ireland who had never been taught about salvation. Through the boy's story of searching for a lost sheep, Darby illustrates the gospel message, revealing how the boy's experience mirrors that of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who seeks and saves the lost. As Darby explains the parable from Luke 15, the boy's heart opens to the truth of Christ's sacrifice and love. In his final days, the boy finds peace and hope in accepting Jesus as his Savior, passing away with His name on his lips. This powerful encounter emphasizes the urgency of sharing the gospel with those who are lost and in need of salvation.

Transcript

Many years ago he was asked to see a poor boy who was dying in a lonely district in Ireland.

He says: After upwards of an hour's toilsome walking (for the roads which in some places led over steep hills were in others scarcely passable on account of the heavy marshes), on entering the little cottage I looked round me and at first found no sign of any inhabitant, except an old woman who sat crouching over the embers of a peat fire. She rose as I entered, and with the natural courtesy of the Irish poor offered me the low chair or rather stool on which she had been seated.

I thanked her, and passing on to the object of my visit discovered in one corner of the hut a heap of straw on which lay the poor sufferer. Some scanty covering, probably his own wearing apparel, had been thrown over him, but as to bed or bed clothes there was none discernible in this humble dwelling.

I approached, and saw a young lad about seventeen or eighteen years of age evidently in a state of extreme suffering and exhaustion, and it was to be feared in the last stage of consumption. His eyes were closed, but he opened them on my approach and stared at me with a kind of wild wonder, like a frightened animal.

I told him as quietly as possible who I was, and for what purpose I had come, and put a few of the simplest questions to him respecting his hope of salvation. He answered nothing, he appeared totally unconscious of my meaning.

On pressing him further, and speaking to him kindly and affectionately, he looked up, and I ascertained from the few words he uttered that he had heard something of a God and future judgment, but he had never been taught to read. The Holy Scriptures were a sealed book to him, and he was consequently altogether ignorant of the way of salvation as revealed to us in the gospel. His mind on this subject was truly an utter blank.

I was struck with dismay and almost with despair. Here was a fellow creature whose immortal soul, apparently on the verge of eternity, must be saved or lost for ever; and he lay before me now, the hand of death close upon him; not a moment was to be lost and what was I to do? What way was I to take to begin to teach him, as it were at the eleventh hour, the first rudiments of christianity?

I had scarcely ever before felt such a sinking within me. I could do nothing, that I knew full well, but on the other hand God could do all; I therefore raised up my heart and besought my heavenly Father for Christ's sake to direct me in this most difficult and trying position, and to open to me by His Spirit of wisdom a way to set forth the glad tidings of salvation so as to be understood by this poor benighted wanderer.

I was silent for a few moments whilst engaged in inward prayer and gazing with deep anxiety on the melancholy object before me. It struck me that I ought to try to discover how far his intelligence in other things extended, and whether there might not be reasonable hope of his understanding me when I should commence to open to him (as I was bound to do) the gospel message of salvation. I looked down upon him with an eye of pity, which I most sincerely felt, and I thought he observed that compassionate look, for he softened towards me as I said: 'My poor boy, you are very ill, I fear you suffer a great deal!'

'Yes, I have a bad cold; the cough takes away my breath and hurts me greatly'.

'Have you had this cough long?' I asked.

'Oh, yes, a long time; near a year now'.

'And how did you catch it? A Kerry boy, I should have thought, would have been reared hardily and accustomed to this sharp air!'

'Ah', he answered, 'and so I was until that terrible night - it was about this time last year when one of the sheep went astray. My father keeps a few sheep upon the mountains and this is the way we live. When he reckoned them that night there was one wanting, and he sent me to look for it'.

'No doubt', I replied, 'you felt the change from the warmth of the peat fire in this close little hut, to the cold mountain blast'.

'Oh! that I did; there was snow upon the ground, and the wind pierced me through; but I did not mind it much, as I was so anxious to find father's sheep'.

'And did you find it?' I asked, with increased interest.

'Oh, yes, I had a long, weary way to go, but I never stopped until I found it'.

'And how did you get it home? You had trouble enough with that too, I daresay. Was it willing to follow back?'

'Well, I did not like to trust it, and besides, it was dead beat and tired, so I laid it on my shoulders and carried it home that way'.

'And were they not all at home rejoiced to see you when you returned with the sheep?'

'Sure enough, and that they were', he replied. 'Father and mother, and the people round that heard of our loss, all came in the next morning to ask about the sheep, for the neighbours in these matters are mighty kind to each other. Sorry they were, too, to hear that I was kept out the whole dark night; it was morning before I got home, and the end of it was I caught this cold. Mother says I will never be better now, God knows best; anyways, I did my best to save the sheep'.

Wonderful! I thought, here is the whole gospel history. The sheep is lost, the father sends his son to seek for and recover it. The son goes willingly, suffers all without complaining, and in the end sacrifices his life to find the sheep, and when recovered he carries it home on his shoulders to the flock, and rejoices with his friends and neighbours over the sheep which was lost, but is found again. My prayer was answered, my way was made plain, and by the grace of God I availed myself of this happy opening.

I explained to this poor dying boy the plan of salvation, making use of his own simple and affecting story. I read to him the few verses in Luke 15, where the care of the shepherd for the strayed sheep is so beautifully expressed, and he at once perceived the likeness, and followed me with deep interest while I explained to him the full meaning of the parable.

The Lord mercifully opened not only his understanding, but his heart also, to receive the things spoken. He himself was the lost sheep, Jesus Christ the good Shepherd, who was sent by the Father to seek for him, and who left all the joys of that Father's heavenly glory to come down to earth and search for him and other lost ones like himself; and as the poor boy had borne without murmuring the freezing snowstorm and the piercing wind, so has the blessed Saviour endured the fierce contradictions of sinners against Himself, and the bitter scorn and insults heaped upon Him, without opening His mouth to utter one word of complaint, and at last laid down His precious life, that we might be rescued from destruction and brought safe to our everlasting home. Neither will He trust His beloved ones, when rescued, to tread the perilous path alone, but bears them on His shoulders rejoicing to the heavenly fold.

My poor sick lad seemed to drink it all in. He received it all; he understood it all. I never saw a clearer proof of the power of the divine Spirit to apply the word of God.

He survived our first meeting but a few days. I had no time to read or expound to him any other portion of the Scripture. At times we could hear nothing but stifling, rending cough; at times he slumbered heavily for a little, but whenever he was able to think and listen, these verses in Luke 15 satisfied and cheered him. He accepted Christ as his Saviour, he earnestly prayed to be carried home like the lost sheep in the heavenly Shepherd's arms. He died humbly, peacefully, almost exulting, with the name of Jesus, my Saviour and my Shepherd, the last upon his lips.

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