

(The Full Gospel) 11. Two Types of Backsliders and Two Types of Leaders

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between two types of backsliders and treating them with compassion and wisdom, while also highlighting the need for shepherds and fathers in the church.

Scripture: Jeremiah 3:15, Ezekiel 34:1, Luke 15:4, 1 Corinthians 4:14, 1 Corinthians 13:7, Philippians 1:9

Topics: "Backsliding", "Repentance"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the two types of backsliders as described by Jesus in Luke 15 - the lost sheep and the lost son. He emphasizes the importance of shepherds after God's own heart who diligently seek out and bring back the backslidden believers, just as the Good Shepherd goes after the lost sheep. Poonen also highlights the distinction between the righteous persons who need no repentance, living in constant repentance, and the rebellious sons who must come to genuine repentance on their own. He urges discernment in welcoming backsliders with immediate, warm acceptance, resembling the father in the parable of the prodigal son.

Transcript

There are two types of backsliders - and Jesus spoke about both of them in Luke 15. The first one He described as a lost sheep. The second one He pictured as a lost son.

The Lost Sheep

"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds itThere will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:4, 7).

It was not a goat that the shepherd went seeking. It was a sheep - a sheep that had once been in the fold. This parable refers to a born-again believer who has backslidden. But he has not left the church in a spirit of rebellion. Like a sheep, he went astray through carelessness. Perhaps he was deceived. Perhaps, because of his weakness, he was overpowered by attractions that proved to be too much for him. The Good Shepherd goes after such a sheep UNTIL He finds it. We who are under-shepherds must do the same. We must go after those who have backslidden from the church through carelessness, Satanic

deception and their lusts.

One of the charges that the Lord made against the shepherds of Israel, 600 years before the birth of Christ was this:

"The sheep that are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lostand they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no-one to search or seek for them....Behold I am against these shepherds....Behold I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out....I will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day" (Ezekiel 34:1-12).

Many sheep are lost on a cloudy and gloomy day - a day when they are discouraged and depressed by the pressure of some trial or sorrow that proves to be too much for them. The Lord says that He will seek for such sheep and bring them back. He seeks for them through "shepherds after His own heart" (Jeremiah 3:15). It must be the longing of all of us in the church - both brothers and sisters - to be shepherds after God's own heart, who can seek out the many lost sheep around us today.

There are many who are ready to criticise and condemn such sheep saying that they should not have wandered so close to the edge of the cliff, or that they should have stayed in the midst of the flock and not wandered off by themselves seeking other pastures, or that they should not have listened to the voices of the false shepherds, etc., etc. There is no dearth of specialists who are ready to give an accurate analysis of the reasons for the backsliding of these sheep. What is sadly lacking is shepherds after God's own heart who will go after these lost sheep and bring them back to the fold. This is the great need in the church today.

The Lord's True Flock

The Lord describes His flock in this parable as "righteous persons WHO NEED NO REPENTANCE" (Luke 15:7).

Amazing words! Is it possible that there are human beings on earth who are living in such victory over ALL conscious sin in their lives, that the Lord Himself certifies that they need NO repentance?

Yes there are such godly ones even today on earth. They are the Lord's true flock. No church in the world consists entirely of such people, for every single group in Christendom has been corrupted by infiltrators and outsiders, who have been sent by Satan to corrupt the witness of the church. Even Jesus had a Judas Iscariot in his "church". The apostles had their Ananiases and Sapphiras and Demases too. But none of these people ever got power in the church in those days. That is how Jesus and the apostles preserved the purity of their fellowships.

These righteous persons whom the Lord described as not needing any repentance, are the real church of Jesus Christ. They don't need any repentance, because they are judging themselves all the time. They keep short accounts with God, striving always to have a conscience that is without offense towards God and towards men. They are quick to confess the slightest sinful thought or attitude to God, and equally quick to confess the slightest sinful word or deed to men as well. Thus they live each day of their lives as those who need no repentance - because they are living in constant repentance. These and these alone

constitute the Lord's true flock.

Every church that the Lord is building today should have a core of such "righteous persons who need no repentance", if it is to be a pure and powerful testimony for the Lord in these last days. Every backslider (lost sheep) must seek to join and fellowship with such a flock of godly people, and not with any group that calls itself a 'church'.

It is no use engaging in evangelism and bringing in a lost sheep to a fold that consists of ninety-nine sheep who are riddled with diseases and who are biting and tearing each other apart - sheep who are not righteous and who have plenty to repent about themselves! A lost sheep will be far more lost if it were to join such a fellowship! Such a sheep would be far safer out in the wilderness than inside such backslidden churches. To bring lost sheep into some churches these days is like admitting sick people to a dirty hospital where they acquire sicknesses that they never had when they came to the hospital!!! What is needed first of all, before engaging in evangelism, is a thorough cleansing within the church itself.

The Lost Son

"A certain man had two sons....The younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living....When he came to his senses, he said, 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' (Luke 15:11-24)

This backslider is different. He was a son who sought his own, and rebelled against his father and went away, criticising his father and his home and his family-members. He criticises the elders and the brothers and sisters in the church, and seeks to exalt himself at their expense.

In this parable, unlike the earlier one, we do NOT see God going after the lost son. He allows the lost son to reap what he has sown and to suffer the consequences of his rebellion. And when the son has come to an end of himself, he comes back to his father's house on his own. He is not carried home on anyone's shoulder. He repents and comes back on his own, sick and tired of himself. God's love for such backsliders is manifested in NOT going after them, but allowing them to reap what they have sown until they have come to an end of themselves, and then to return to Him in brokenness and genuine repentance.

Since most believers in every church are carnal, they lack wisdom, and so do not know how to distinguish between these two types of backsliders. On the one hand, they seek to carry rebellious sons on their shoulders back into the church, and criticise the elders for not doing this. On the other hand, they ignore the lost sheep and do nothing to go after them and bring them back. They console those who should be rebuked, and they rebuke those who should be comforted.

To feed rebellious sons and daughters (who have left their Heavenly Father and His house) is the best way to ensure that they never ever return to God. Such acts are not acts of compassion but acts of folly. It is because many seek their own honour and reputation, that they speak kind words to rebellious believers, instead of rebuking them. Their words and actions only ensure that these lost sons stay out in the far country even longer - and in some cases forever. The blood of these prodigal sons who perish in the far country and go to hell, will finally be on the hands of those who helped and comforted them.

(NOTE: A word of caution is necessary for all Pharisees at this point: Just because someone has left YOUR group and joined some other fellowship, does NOT mean that he has left the Father's house - for the Father's house is much wider than your petty little group! So don't use this parable or the above paragraph to justify your Pharisaical attitude towards someone who has left your group. Perhaps you need to realise your own need that you are like the elder brother in the parable, and not like the father at all).

When these rebellious sons do return to the church in true brokenness and repentance, our hearts must be wide open to welcome them, and we must not allow them to wallow in their misery and sorrow. This is where the difference between those who are like God and those who are like the Pharisees is seen clearly. Although it will take time for confidence to be restored and for these prodigal sons to be restored to any ministry in the church, yet as far as acceptance and fellowship are concerned, this must be IMMEDIATE, warm, and wholehearted - exactly as the Lord described in the parable, with feasting and rejoicing!

Discern Between the Two

The great need in our day is for our love to be guided by wisdom.

Paul's prayer was,

"I pray that your love will grow in real discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent (as opposed to those things that are merely good)" (Philippians 1:9, 10).

If we are to distinguish between these two types of backsliders around us, we will have to develop the habit of listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our spirits at all times, so that we don't live either by Pharisaic rules or by worldly compassion. If we depend on our own reason, we are bound to make mistakes. We need to be humble, and we need to hate our own human strictness and our own human love.

Shepherds and Fathers

There are two types of leaders in the church too. The good ones are like shepherds and fathers. The self-seeking ones are like hirelings and tutors. It is by our attitude towards backsliders that we can discern which category we fit in to.

Just like true shepherds are rare in the church, true fathers are rare too. Just like hirelings abound on every hand, teachers who seek their own, abound too. Why? Because it is easier to be a hireling than to be a shepherd, and it is easier to be a teacher in the church than a father. It costs heart-pain and burden and battling in prayer against the wolves and the roaring adversaries, if we are to be fathers and shepherds. And most people don't want to pay such a price to serve the Lord or to build the church. Most people try to build the church cheaply.

Paul, as a true father to the failing, carnal Corinthian Christians, told them, "I do not want to shame you. Even if you have countless teachers in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers. In Christ Jesus I became your father" (1 Corinthians 4:14, 15).

The father (in Jesus' parable) did not put his repentant son on probation for six months. Nor did he make him live in the servant's quarters. No. He believed in him, and had hope for him. "Love believes all things and hopes all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

A true father will never, never shame his children or reveal their faults to others, even when they backslide. Teachers in schools and colleges however rejoice to make their students' follies known to others. By our attitude towards the faults and failings of others, we can know whether we are fathers or teachers.

The Lord is looking for true fathers and shepherds in the church.

Source:

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