

The experiences of a lost sheep (Quality: Very good)

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- [0 : 00] I will venture to ask your attention to the last verse in the chapter that we read. That is the 119th Psalm.
- I will venture to speak from the verse 176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep.
- Seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments. I have gone astray like a lost sheep.
- Seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments. A few remarks on the general setting of the 119th Psalm.
- It is generally believed to be a psalm of King David. A long psalm dwelling very sweetly upon the benefit of the Word of God.
- [1 : 05] The statutes, the commandments, the precepts of the Holy Book, the Bible. My friends, what a wonderful appreciation we have of Scripture running through as a theme in this long, exceptionally long psalm in our Bibles.
- But where the grace of God is in exercising the soul, the Holy Spirit will invariably lead to an appreciation of Holy Scripture.
- Now, one thing that seems very generally the experience of the people of God when they are born again of the Spirit and come to a knowledge of the asset, the blessing of Holy Scripture, they give expression in similar terms from their hearts.
- Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. My friends, it is not just having a Bible.
- It is not just reading a Bible. But we need the Holy Spirit to show us what lays beneath. Oh, it is not just an interesting record of Jewish history.
- [2 : 33] It is not just a testimony of the experiences of the prophets and those of ancient time. It is not just, as it were, a relation of the purposes of God to salvation.
- And especially in the New Testament, we have the precious gospel of God's grace, the wonderful coming, living and dying, rising again of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is so full of application to the sinner's need.
- Yes, we need the Lord. Yes, we need the Lord by His Spirit to show us those wondrous things that are revealed to us in Holy Scripture.
- And it is indeed a mark of growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ when we can say, I love my Bible.
- I love the law of the Most High God given to us by patient inspiration through many generations and under the hand of many differing characters.
- [3 : 49] But nevertheless, in the embodiment of Scripture, we have a saving testimony to guide us and teach us and lead us in the way everlasting.

I might open by saying, Do you love your Bible? Do you love your Bible? Has God so shown to you the benefit of instruction from His own precious Word that you feel here you have a book that teaches you purely, simply and graciously those things not only that are necessary to us in this present life, but also in life eternal, in that world, that world that is to come.

Well now, yes, we have a long testimony in this 119th Psalm.

And my mind has been led to the last verse, but by all means, I would counsel you to look through the Psalm with self-examination.

What do I know of this exercise of grace that enabled the Psalmist to make such wondrous testimonies of his love for the truth, his confidence in the Bible and the leadings and teachings divine that are therein contained?

[5 : 45] Another thing, I wonder how many of our children here present this morning know the number of letters in the alphabet. We've got an English alphabet.

A to Z. There are a number of letters that come into general use in reading and writing.

And they all have their place. They all signify a certain meaning and they are in common use to communicate in so many areas of our commercial as well as our private lives together.

Well now, we have 26 letters in our alphabet. But how many letters were there in the Hebrew alphabet?

For Hebrew, the Hebrew language is a different language from the English language. But nevertheless, it pleased God to inspire in the Hebrew tongue, especially the Old Testament Scriptures.

[7 : 13] And in this particular Psalm, we have 24, not 26, but 24 letters as were used by the Jews in their Hebrew communications.

Now, it has pleased God, and I can't give you the reason why, except everything under God is pure wisdom.

It has pleased God to break this testimony of the psalmist into 24 sections.

and each section is headed in the 119th Psalm by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

It's a wonderful thing to ease, as it were, the memory of certain sections together as they're separate under the alphabet, but I can't tell you why, except there is a theme running through the whole psalm which is well worthy of our meditation and consideration.

[8 : 40] The text is the last verse in this long psalm.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep. God created all things. God gave to all his creatures a peculiar and particular nature.

Their format, such as all, their maker is suitable to the will of God as they fulfill their varying functions in nature.

And my friends, I'm going to focus my thoughts on the fact that the psalmist said, I've gone astray like a lost sheep.

I've gone astray like a lost sheep. Now, a sheep has certain characteristics which God created in that particular animal from the beginning.

[10 : 01] And it is as true today as it ever has been in the history of mankind. God created a sheep with certain characteristics.

Many of them are very commendable but certain of them can be very harmful to the animal involved. The psalmist here says, I've gone astray like a lost sheep.

I introduce here an experience I had in Wales many years ago now when we were on holiday and we wandered up into the hills near to Devil's Bridge if some of you know where that is.

We were staying quite near to Aberystwyth and we were then younger and enjoyed walking up hills and we walked up toward Devil's Bridge in the countryside.

We didn't go on the railway, we didn't follow the road, we broke our passage through the fields and hills obtaining and at one point we came across a sheep, a sheep making tremendous noise, bleating and calling and bleating and calling and it was rushing about from here to there.

[11 : 48] It just seemed as though we might say it had lost its senses, didn't know what to do nor where to go and it made all the noise a sheep could make and it rushed around as quick as its forelegs would carry.

Now, to me, that was a very useful ministry stored up in life's experience because I realised what a sad situation it is when we are like lost sheep that have gone astray and are as it were acting in a most unprofitable manner because of the mistake if you like we've made in separating ourselves from the flock being as it were outside the influence of the shepherd at that particular point.

So there we are alone. There we are in a situation that is somewhat terrifying and we're using every faculty of our being to express our alarm if you like the terror of our hearts.

now that poor sheep that poor sheep had gone astray.

At some point an attraction seems to have arisen whether it was to drink out of the stream or what it was some special attractive food presented itself and it wandered off and one would judge that the flock and its shepherd had gone off ahead and this sheep all of a sudden came to its senses and realised that it had missed out the benefits of being cared for by the shepherd and associated with the flock and it was terrorised by the separation.

[14 : 14] Now it seems here that the psalmist is lamenting a relevant situation. I have gone astray like a lost sheep.

Something has attracted me. Something has taken hold of me. And instead of as it were pursuing the time-honoured practice of associating with the flock and keeping under the influence and direction of the shepherd, here I am on my own, somewhat desolated by the foolishness of that wandering spirit that has occasioned the whole basis of the trouble.

The confession here embodied in the text is a very real experience.

Very real experience, especially to those that have enjoyed the benefits of the Lord.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.

[15 : 47] There's everything as it were to make for peace and quiet and satisfaction. But something has taken us away.

Something has occasioned a wandering. Something has appeared to us very desirable but it's so distinct from the leading of the shepherd, the care he exercises over the flock.

And it's distinct from the companionship of creatures of like nature to ourselves. It seems that the psalmist here is lamenting a situation where he's gone his own way and he hasn't paid regard to the leading and teaching and example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that good shepherd that laid down his life for his sheep and also what a benefit there is in walking in the steps of the godly, walking in the way of righteousness, walking according to the wisdom of God as he has given us counsel in his holy word as what is right, what is profitable, what is

God glorifying and soul comforting in the wilderness. You know, there are two things that are of great moment in Christian experience.

that is the leading of the shepherd and the fellowship of the church. And it seems here that suddenly, as it were, a realization has overtaken the psalmist and he said, look, I forfeited much that is profitable, that is good, that is comforting and healthful in spiritual experience by wandering, wandering, wandering from the narrow way, wandering from the precepts of the truth, wandering from the fellowship and example of the people of God.

[18 : 40] So I wouldn't like them to know much of what I've been doing, and what I've been saying and the situation of my heart that's been torn away from the benefits of God and godliness into the way of the world and those things that constitute unprofitableness in the lives in the lives that we live.

I've gone astray like a lost ship. Sometimes it can be an idol, can't it? Oh, you get so attracted to it, you get so gathered up as it were in the promise of it, according to your natural calculation that you sell the truth.

You sell the truth and buy something that is of such infinitely inferior value.

And then when the Lord brings you to your senses by his grace and according to his saving purposes in your heart, you say, what a fool I was.

What a fool I was. What a price I've had to pay. What losses I've sustained by giving way, as it were, to the natural inclinations of my heart.

[20 : 18] And I've sold so much at such a mean price. I've gone astray like a lost sheep.

To stray into the world and its pleasures. Stray into those activities which carry with them such a powerful attraction to the natural mind.

And my friends, we've got a natural mind. And we've got a dangerous natural mind. left to the domination of its influence. We need the Lord to keep us, don't we?

And here the psalmist is lamenting the fact that, oh, he knew what it was to be favoured of the Lord. He knew what it was to have the benefits of the gospel shed abroad in his heart and his life.

life, but he's come to a point and a place, he's come to a situation where he's been drawn away, drawn away.

[21 : 34] And the things of God, the things of the church, in the fellowship of it, become of no equal value.

In fact, they are of such inferior value that you can say they're not worth possessing comparatively.

Well, now I've gone astray like a lost sheep. Oh, where are you in the spirit of your heart?

What is the dominant consideration? I'll tell you the chief value in your whole being is your immortal soul.

There's nothing, nothing of greater value than the value of our souls. And my friends, when the health and benefit of our souls gives place to the fleeting pleasures and pursuits of this present life, we are virtually sin-sick people.

[22 : 57] We've gone astray like lost sheep. We're in, as it were, a state of spiritual turmoil.

world. We can't find that which is peaceable, comforting, and helpful in our spiritual life.

The way of the world is not a way of spiritual profit. I turned this up this morning in my reading.

John, in his third epistle, he is writing to the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

And he says this, Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

[24 : 01] he was so appreciative of the health of Gaius' soul, that his desire was that his physical and mental health should be equal to the health of his soul.

We might say, well, I wish my soul was as healthy as my body. I feel quite comparatively fit, and my mind is active and very useful instrument.

in business and in family responsibilities and the more common commitments of life. Yes, I'm quite thankful in that sense for my natural condition.

God's condition. But what about your soul? John says, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

And my friends, what a wonderful condition it is when our souls are so healthy that we can desire before God and among men that our physical and mental condition is equal to the health of our soul.

[25 : 25] Oh, so much concern associates with us in regard to the health of our body and our mind, that we'll go to almost any length and sacrifice almost any asset that we possess to be physically and mentally fit.

But what about our souls? John had got the balance right and even as thy soul prospereth, he realised that Gaius was bringing forth, as it were, that healthy condition of soul that made him wish that Gaius, whatever his physical and mental infirmities were, that he should be in health physically and mentally equally to that which evidenced a healthy soul.

I've gone astray like a lost sheep. Now, the things that concern us spiritually inevitably lose their place and power power in our lives when we go astray.

When we go astray. A healthy soul is a praying soul. A healthy soul is a hungry soul.

It can't feed on the husks that the swine do eat. It wants good food. It wants feeding with the bread and water of eternal life.

[27 : 14] My friends, let us examine ourselves and see whether we be in the faith or now. Maybe we've gone astray like a lost sheep. Perhaps you've known better days.

Perhaps there's a season in your experience when you sat under the shadow of the Almighty with great delight and his fruit was sweet to your taste.

You longed as it were for access to the sanctuary and to meet with the sheep of Christ's pasture and hear the precious truth and pure doctrine of God's word expounded by his sent servants.

And you could say from your very heart a day in thy courts is of more value than a thousand other ways spent.

And what about God's word? What about God's word? I've gone astray. I've hardly got time to read a few verses out of the Bible.

[28 : 22] I'm so engrossed in the acquisition of wealth and prosperity in this present world that, well, six days of the week, so to speak, just have a few conscience solving attendants upon a short reading and the lesser the length of the Psalms you read proves more advantageous to you.

you certainly wouldn't sit down and read the 119th Psalm because that would be spending too much time with your Bible. And, you know, I'm just trying to illustrate soul sickness.

I've gone astray like a lost sheep. I've gone astray like a lost sheep. And what about the precepts of Scripture?

The way you speak. the way you convey your thoughts to others. There's a distinction made in the speech of the people of God by the sanctifying grace of God.

If you've got grace in your heart, you'll speak in a way that speaks and testifies of your relationship with Jesus Christ.

[29 : 47] They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus because they spoke in a way of speaking that was humble, that was gracious, that was acknowledging the sovereignty of God over all as well as the needs that obtained in living the life here below.

I've gone astray like a large sheep. Look, there was a time when the things of God was transcendent. I was guilty of wishing there were seven days of Sabbath, six days of Sabbath to one day of work.

It seemed as though your love for the Lord and the things of God gave you such pleasure. But oh, what about it now?

What about it? Haven't you got time to come to chapel? What about the week evening service? Is it a commitment that gnaws a bit at your conscience, conscience?

But you can't find the time to spend in the house of God. If you're there twice on a Sunday, well that's satisfactory. My friends, the things of God, the ways of God, oh how keen they are in our appetite spiritually considered.

[31 : 37] If so be, we're in a healthy spiritual state. I've gone astray like a lost sheep. Oh, I don't find communion. I don't find fellowship with the people of God.

When we meet we talk about social matters, we talk about those things which concern our home and our families and our businesses, the things of God and the things spiritual that perhaps are locked up in the past favours that we've enjoyed of the presence and power of God.

They're no longer the subjects of our conversation. They that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written.

My friends, our gospel communications are recorded in God's book. What a wonderful thing it is when we delight to speak of the things which God has taught us, the things which God has done within us as for us in his providential appearances along life's way.

come and hear all ye that fear God and I will tell you what he has done for my soul. That is not the language of a straying sheep, that's the language of one who is sitting under the sweet shadow shadow of the Lord and his Holy Spirit's presence within the heart.

[33 : 31] I've gone astray. Oh my friends, what is there of real value in the world and the things of it compared with the value of possessing a good hope through grace and the witness of the Holy Spirit, that God is our God, our Heavenly Father.

And he knows everything. Oh, I love that scriptural expression. Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. That seems to bring into focus the security of the saints.

Look, God knows. God knows. The need, he knows the need before the need arises and he knows how he will meet the need.

And he is praying people by the circumstances which they have no knowledge of at the present, but will enter into as the will and way of the Heavenly Father unfolds.

before them. He knoweth the way that I take. When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

[34 : 58] Now I've gone astray like a lost sheep. My loss is tremendous if I've lost the benefits of the ministry of the Spirit, the activities of faith that worketh by love within my own heart and within my own soul.

I'm a poor man having strayed from the ways of true godliness, peace and spiritual prosperity.

now I've gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek thy servant, seek thy servant.

Oh Lord, when you realize where you are and what you've forfeited, what has been stolen from you, what has been stolen robbers, the thieves have come in and they've turned your world upside down and you're in that condition similarly to the sheep that I referred to in my initial remarks and experience.

My friends, there you are rushing about and calling about and there's only one to answer. There's only one to restore.

[36 : 26] And David in the psalm, he said, Psalm 23 that we all are so conversable. He restoreth my soul. Don't think if you've strayed and you've gone a long way and everything spiritual seems to have lost its attraction and its meaning, don't think that that's an irrecoverable condition and position.

He restoreth my soul and the Lord can bring you back to spiritual health. He can bring you back, if I'm going to put it in this way, to your spiritual senses, to your sense of relative values, which is the more important and which is the more beneficial to your whole being and outlook.

I've gone astray like I've lost you. Oh, what comfort there is in pouring your cares into the ears of the Almighty, knowing that he's able to do exceeding abundantly for you, above all you can ask or even think.

When you pray, you call into activity omnipotence and omnipotence can excel the highest imagination of your heart.

What a sad thing it is when prayer becomes a formal attendance upon a conscious solving experience.

[38 : 09] Oh, my friends, how wonderful when the word of God is precious. When we come to it and we don't know which portion to read and we say, Lord, direct my mind to that which will be most suitable to my present situation and need.

Do you know what it is to have opened your Bible after praying the Lord's direction and you've seen a word that you scarcely knew was in the Bible, but it speaks to you.

It sets things in order for you and you feel you've got the word of God to do what you're doing or the word of God to refrain from what you're doing because God has warned you that it's not for your well-being that you persist.

Seek thy servant. Seek thy servant. You may have run in your sin-sick condition to the ends of the earth so to speak.

you think I can't really feel I'm a Christian. I can't really feel that the Lord has a favour to me because where am I?

[39 : 48] What is my condition? My heart is hard. My interest in spiritual things seems to have taken wings and flown away and there I am going still to chapel but not exercised about what I'm going to hear and who I'm going to see.

My friends a sick condition is it irrecoverable? I love the testimony of scripture concerning our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

He went into a certain place and he healed all the sicknesses of the people. We have a physician in heaven that there's not a condition but what it's recoverable.

How far off you may have been and you may say this morning I've wondered I've wondered I've wondered and I'm so far off from what once I knew and enjoyed I feel now to be in the world and of it to a great degree I'm like in a prison house of circumstance and I don't know what to do.

Call upon me in the day of trouble I will hear thee and thou shalt glorify me. My friends there's not a prison house of sin or for Satan but what the Lord can do what he did for Peter.

[41 : 27] He opened the prison doors and Peter came to the door it was open and Peter could go and find his fellow believers in the town.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep seek my servant for I do not forget thy commandments one of the commandments is look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth for I am God and there is none else.

We very readily when we're naturally sick we run to the doctor to the physician we value his recommendation we're ready to do what he suggests.

There's a physician of the soul my friends there's a physician of the soul many sicknesses were present among the people when he traversed the 33 years of his life here as Emmanuel God with us and there was never a sickness that came to him in a humble importunate spirit who he sent unhealed away.

God to encourage us whatever backsliding condition we may have been in however deceived we've been however readily as it were we've forfeited the comfort of our faith for the unrewarding tiny so-called advantages of this world Jesus is a good physician he heals and can heal every disorder of the soul the Lord speaks of healing backsliders he speaks of restoring that is bringing again into the enjoyment of the things that really matter and cause the ways of

[44 : 28] God and godliness again not to be an hopesom duty but to be a holy and humble delight I've gone astray like a lost sheep seek thy servant for I do not forget thy commandments oh what a wonderful thing when the relish for spiritual things is renewed in our hearts and in our lives and we can enjoy again the sweetness of God's word the access to his throne of grace and to the benefits of fellowship with his dear people in the context of the Christian church well I hope what I've said this morning I could say I wish I didn't know so much of it wandering wandering is a play a wandering heart it seems to take so little to rob us of so much but my friends the Lord knows as the shepherd knows the weaknesses and frailties of his sheep the Lord knows and he knows what is embodied in me sweet psalm of

David he leadeth me he leadeth me in the green pastures and beside the still waters he restoreth my soul what a blessing what a blessing he hath not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities he's a merciful he's a gracious he's a compassionate and he's an all powerful Lord God almighty amen