

Leaving the 99



Peter Scott . 2010

Leaving the Ninety-nine

Sermon . Peter Scott . 2009

Transcribed and edited 2010

Scripture from the New American Standard Version

Jesus Christ brought a dramatic change not only to the Christian community, but to the whole world. Perhaps you aren't aware just how dramatic the change has been, so let's make it clear. The difference between the world before and after the coming of Christ is unbelievable. He has changed the course of individual hearts, people groups, and nations. If He had not come, the earth would be a very terrible place, indeed.

Jesus simple statement, "I am the Good Shepherd." changed many, many things. In Matthew 18:12 he says,

*What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and **one** of them goes astray, does he not leave the 99 and go to the mountains to seek the one who is straying? If he should find it, assuredly I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the 99 that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that **one of these little ones** should perish.*

This simple illustration, changed for many the meaning of the human race, changed the course of nations, and literally helped to change civilization. I believe God used it to open the eyes of many to the true value of human life. Notice how He said, "*What do you think?*" To Him it was a most natural question. Most of the governments of the world would say, "*One sheep? Who cares!*" Think about it. To the natural mind, who really cares about one sheep? An Islamic extremist would mandate a Jihad a very different approach from Christ's. Take one sheep, strap a bomb on it and send it in among the innocent. The result would be tragic, taking many innocent lives. But to the murderous religious zealot, who cares? It is only one person. After all, it is needful that one should die so that we can promulgate our doctrine.

But thankfully this is totally opposite to what Jesus is saying here. He forever changed for us the whole scope, the whole understanding, the whole meaning of who we are as human beings. In light of who He is, and what He's said and done, we can no longer let the individual perish for the sake of the whole community. Some have even said, "If the individual gets in the way, let's just run them over." *May it never be!* Because Jesus came

into this world and spoke the following words everything has changed. Here is my main text to illustrate Father's love for the individual and why we also should have the same priority.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

In John 10:11-16 He says, "*I am the Good Shepherd.*"

Aren't you glad He is the *Good Shepherd*, not just a shepherd?

The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

Now, in this text He's speaking of His people in a plural sense, concerning protection, love, nurturing, caring.

But a hireling, he who is not a shepherd, is one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.

Let me interject that one could probably use the word "hireling" concerning many politicians. Again, the Lord says,

I am the Good Shepherd. I know My sheep.

Let us be clear. He knows each one of us by name; He has counted every hair.

I know My sheep and I am known by My own. As the Father knows Me even so, I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. There are other sheep which I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they will hear My voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

These scriptures speak about the Lord protecting His people; we're not able to protect ourselves. How can a sheep protect itself from a wolf? It simply cannot happen. As a result, because of Christ's willingness to offer His life for the sake of the helpless, whole nations have changed their focus. Thankfully, America is not a nation out to pillage and plunder other nations. By contrast, most of the time, the Roman Empire did exactly that. It was out to increase its *wealth, power, influence*, etc. The Roman focus was on themselves, not the peoples of other nations. They treated those they conquered cruelly and unmercifully. Some whom they conquered, were literally obliterated from the face of the earth. America is not a nation

like that. Similarly, this church is not a congregation out to increase our wealth or influence either. At the root of our identity are Jesus' words "I am the Good Shepherd."

The Lord has called us to follow His example. Consider David's words in 1 Samuel 17,

Your servant used to keep his father's sheep. And when the lion and the bear came and took a lamb out of the flock . . .

Let's imagine that scene for a moment. What would you do? Suppose you are the shepherd and the sheep taken by the wild animal belongs to your dad. Would you somehow rationalize doing nothing? Would you say to yourself, "Well it probably was a weak one anyway." Would you say, "I don't care?" No? But David did care; he did defend the defenseless. He says,

I went out after it . . . (an aggressive posture. It was one of seeking out the enemy.) . . . and struck it and delivered the lamb from its mouth. (He had to take it right out of its mouth.) And when it rose against me, I caught it by its beard and struck it and killed it. . . . both the lion and the bear. And this uncircumcised Philistine (Goliath) will be like one of them. He has defied the armies of the living God. Moreover David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

NO TURNING BACK

David knew something about the heart of God because he knew His heart for loving and protecting his sheep, he knew there was no turning back. This same chapter states that he *cared* about the flock even when he was involved in other activities. He would return from ministering in King Saul's court and make sure the sheep were okay. I can imagine, even later when he became King, the conversation between himself and the shepherd of his father's flock, "You remember that ewe, Martha? She would bear twins every year. How's she doing? How are her little ones? You know a bear once tried to devour her."

Since David knew the Lord was his Shepherd, he also knew that he had to be a good shepherd as well. David made sure that no matter where he was in doing God's will, he would continue to shepherd his father's flock. Similarly, we look out for one another, because *Jesus* is the Good Shep-

herd. He came into this world and changed everything we know about caring for one another. We simply cannot ignore each other's pain anymore. Our old nature might have said, "Oh well, the wolf got that one. Too bad. The wolf came in; not my problem. After all, what could I do about it? Look at me, I'm just a human being. I don't have teeth like that.

Today God is calling His people to stand up, *go forward in an aggressive posture* against the Philistines of today. The enemy's tactics are the same; he still wants to kill and destroy. He wants to bring the meaning and value of human life to its lowest ebb. Although Satan is alive he is *not* well; he's a "sick pup," and he keeps spewing forth the lies. Many in the world today would like to pretend that Jesus never came into the world, and never spoke the parable of the "lost sheep." But Jesus' words endure anyway. They keep sounding forth through the tumultuous history of our own civilization that is drenched in the blood of men, men against men, armies against armies, people against people, nation against nation. Men are still motivated by gold, silver, wealth and power. Not much has changed since the days of Rome and many nations have chosen the wrong path.

What hope can there be for the earth if mankind continues to reject the Lord? More inhumane behavior? Over the years, men have invented unspeakable tortures, to inflict on one another. But perhaps the most lethal of all is uncaring *neglect*. It is not just lethal to the one inflicted, but to the one inflicting. This behavior makes one insensitive to increasing atrocity. Germany had many prison camps, Buchenvald, Ravensbruck, Dachau; Russia had the Gulag. When the Russian armies would march, those who couldn't keep up, were taken aside and shot, without prayer or mercy. The Romans would abandon their unwanted children. They wouldn't kill them; they would simply leave them on the town dump. Though this may be a bit graphic, this is what humanity apart from God is like, but this is what Jesus came into the world to change!

HUMAN RIGHTS

You've probably heard of the term "human rights behavior." For example, it has been said, "This or that particular nation cannot host the Olympics because of its *human rights* violations." Somehow nations today, in their dialogue with each other, keep a sort of scorecard concerning each others human rights. How many people were imprisoned because of political processes and things of that nature? Was there torture, etc.? Interestingly, this dialogue occurs because of a Christian president, Jimmy Car-

ter. He introduced the subject of human rights into the arena of international relations. His approach went something like this, “You know we cannot deal with this particular country in the usual manner because of its human rights violations.” Where did he get that idea? He was a Sunday school teacher and knew Jesus’ illustration of a shepherd leaving the ninety-nine to rescue the one. He knew that the one deserved to be treated fairly and as appropriately as possible, and not discarded for the sake of the many no matter what government, nation, or ethnic groups were involved.

Of course we know that justice and proper respect for human rights consistently falls short everywhere. But where people turn to Christ, there is hope. Without Jesus alive in people’s hearts, it is just a concept that is easily deserted. But when He and His love for mankind becomes real in the hearts of men, it is no longer a concept; it is reality.

UNDER THE SCOPE

When I was a young microbiologist, I used to do what might have seemed strange to others but was very interesting to me. I wanted to see things the way they really were. The microscope I used was very powerful and effective. It would focus the light at an angle from either side in such a way that you wouldn’t see anything on the slide except, for example, a membrane which would sparkle and reflect back the light (a “dark field”). When you looked at living, human, white cells in this way you could clearly see amazing detail inside the cell. Then since you didn’t have to stain them, you could see them alive. I used to take a slide sample from the inside of my cheek for fun. It was amazing to see white cell macrocytes hunting for bacteria. You could see their pseudopods go out and bring food back in, and inside the cell you could see all kinds of activity, not just an immobile picture, but one full of motion, literally everything was jiggling around. It was so easy to distinguish a live cell from a dead one. Awesome to see.

One day, I read of an amoeba that was called the “Large Race Amoeba,” a giant. Since a white cell can be huge anyway, I wondered how large it could be. I had read that they were 10-100 times larger than an ordinary white cell, so large that you could almost see them with your naked eye. I definitely wanted to see one of those little organisms! I read up on them how they congregate, exchange DNA, and engage in all kinds of behavior. But I was not prepared for what I saw when I finally found one. Do you know where you find these things? Someone told me that you usu-

ally need a culture from some hay situated in a swamp. So I set up Petri dishes with hay and swamp water and would hunt for them. Consistently I would find all kinds of living things in there and put them under the “dark field” scope. One day as I was in the lab with three or four people around me, I saw it, and it was huge! Huge! Pseudopods were streaming out! I quickly made sure that there was enough water so it would live and then I turned the light down so it wouldn’t cook. I wanted to keep it alive as long as I could. As I was watching it feed on the bacteria and other organisms around it, all of a sudden, it stopped dead in its track with just the membranes wiggling a little bit. I switched to low power, thinking, “oh, oh, maybe there’s not enough water and its dying.” *No*, there was enough water so I switched back to high power. Suddenly it streamed out a pseudopod really fast. I looked and there was another one right next to it! I thought they were going to conjugate, reproduce. This is what I’ve been looking for; this is what I wanted to see!

Well, instead, one started running from the other; it was a one-cell organism race. They were running or sliding faster and faster but finally the bigger one caught up, surrounded the smaller one and drew it into a digestive vacuole. At first, the smaller one was struggling to get out, sending out its pseudopods, but it couldn’t break free. Suddenly its inside membranes started to quiver and then *stopped*. Sweat was pouring off my face; I couldn’t believe what I had just seen. I had witnessed a murder. I saw a murder! I looked up from the microscope and everything was still the same in the room, but *I was changed*. I saw one cell *devour* another cell! They’re supposed to congregate, get along! Then I thought, Cain was supposed to get along with Abel. Instead he rose up against his brother and murdered him. Sweat pouring down my shirt, I realized that my old nature was just like that large race amoeba. My old nature was expressed in the attitude that said, “dog eat dog, get ahead, surround, capture, neutralize, kill.”

DO UNTO OTHERS

But God has separated me from my old nature in the waters of baptism as Paul taught in Romans 6:4,

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

We no longer have to walk in harmony with the old nature. Left to our own devices we would be just as cruel as Stalin, or the Nazis in WW II.

But, something has changed in us because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly though, we often come to worship Him simply because of what He's doing for us personally, not understanding that He has introduced change to the whole earth. What is the difference between those who know Him intimately and the religions of this world? What? A violent, religious extremist often has no problem killing, especially Christian believers. If you do not accept their faith, you die. Such a brand of religion offers little hope for humanity.

But this little child, Jesus, born in a stable in Bethlehem, this little one whom His own nation rejected, became the Good Shepherd sent from God, and was, indeed, God Himself, *the* Good Shepherd. When He taught, He consistently made a contrast, saying the Kingdom of God was at hand. But *what* was He contrasting to the Kingdom of God? Very simply, the kingdom of this world, its governments, and its methods for accomplishing its goals. However His Kingdom is totally different, and His ways for accomplishing His goals are in stark contrast with the ways of man. His Kingdom is not populated with people who don't care; its motto is not "dog eat dog"; its agenda is not "amoeba kill amoeba."

Rather, the Kingdom of God says, "Let's care about the individual. Let's shelter, let's protect. Let's not give up on others." You see, our values have changed drastically because of what the Lord has done in us, because of His death and resurrection at Calvary. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Individual, human life is now valued highly by many across the earth because of Him. Many value human life much differently than they used to, not a little, but *much* differently. The doctrine of Communism where the individual has no meaning whatsoever except in the context of the collective community, is diametrically opposed to the teaching of Christ. Because of the Lord, each individual *is now* important. What did He say? "Not one sparrow falls that He doesn't see." We look at a sparrow and scarcely care. Most of us don't even have a bird-feeder to make sure it's well fed. But to our Lord, not one of these little ones perishes that He doesn't see. How encouraging! He cares about every little thing, every individual. This world system elevates "societal progress" above the individual. Such "progress" I do not want to have. Instead, because of Christ's teaching, caring is in my life. I have in my heart a sanctity of human life as never before. As a result of Christianity's influence in our society, we *rescue* someone who's life is in danger. If you see someone's life threatened by another, you *want* to help. Interestingly under Eng-

lish law you are obligated to intervene. If you don't, you are guilty and complicit in the act of aggression.

So you see, David didn't have a choice; he had to go out and rescue that little lamb from the teeth of the bear and the lion. He *had* to do it because he had a relationship with the Good Shepherd. Similarly, we help others in trouble, we care for those we love, and we would never commit murder because His life is in us. Then, there is our attitude of care toward ourselves as well. Did you know that suicide is murder? Do you have thoughts of suicide? Then you are having thoughts about murder. But because of what Jesus said, it's clear that you are too important to Him to be giving yourself over to thoughts like that. He is the one who gives and takes life, and your life is in His hands, not your own. Even if you are experiencing much suffering, He loves you eternally and that means your life is still worth living.

GOD HAS THE LAST WORD

I've heard it said on occasion, "If people are suffering they really should be put out of their misery." Remember, I don't have to understand why there is suffering. For example, in my own life, my father was suffering and wanted to die. Do you know what I told him? "*It's not your business! God is the one who holds life and death in His hands.*" As long as he could minister life to others (and he could) then he needed to live. His attention span was not long, but he could still make people smile; he could still bring joy to the nurses who would care for him.

As hard as this might seem, God, not us, is the one who knows when our time is over. When King Saul was fatally wounded on the battlefield, he knew the enemy would torture him, would probably cut off his head and would parade it. So he called for one of his men to kill him. But when David found out what the soldier had done, he sentenced that man to death. He knew it was not his responsibility to take the King's life no matter what the circumstance.

God is the one who gives life and, too often, men seek to take into their own hands the right, apart from God, as to when it should end. But our days are numbered by Him. We must not kill the unborn because God knows every person in the womb and even before that. Each and every life is so valuable. He even takes all our mistakes and weaves them into His pattern for the cloth of our life. Professional weavers will often do this. When they make a mistake, they artfully integrate it into the overall pat-

tern. When finished, the final product displays, for all to see, the wisdom and talent of the weaver to bring forth beauty out of imperfections. Similarly, God has taken our sins and failures, cleansed them by His blood and is bringing forth in our lives a heavenly designed pattern that will reveal His wisdom and plan for calling us in the first place.

REALITY CHECK

I've had to bring up in this message, some distressing subjects. I've talked about the inhumanity of men. We don't like to look at that. We like to imagine a world in which everybody's a Christian; but that isn't the truth. The truth is that *we are living in a Goliath-Philistine world*. Indeed, there are some really BAD enemies out there, not just seeking to take you in a wrong direction; they want to destroy and obliterate you. They don't want anything to do with becoming a Christian because to do so makes no sense to them. If there is a God, He is too awesome and huge to really care about us. But the truth is, we know He does care. We know this because of the word of God, and because He has come into our hearts. We know that in the very core of our being.

When He baptizes us in His Spirit, He releases in us the power to know and understand both what and who He is and *who we are* in Him. Apart from Him, we could never come to such insight. He opens the word of God to us that we might understand eternal truth. Yet we understand so very little. But one thing we now know for sure. He's the Good Shepherd, He cares for every sparrow. Today we see that He's changed civilization and how everyone defines what that is. And it's not just the believers who've benefited from His work among mankind, but even the "bad guys," those that don't know him. Now, because He has come into this world, we find a growing hope in the hearts of many for the future of humanity. Without Him, there was and is no hope. Without Him, we're doomed to live with the old nature, to look under the microscope and expect that if one cell destroys another, it's likely that we will too. Every nature channel on television, displays so much of animals killing and eating each other.

But we who are called begin to live on a different plane. In contrast to fallen humanity, the prophet Isaiah described the emerging Kingdom of God this way,

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain . . . (Is. 65:25)

CONCLUSION

We are not doomed; we are not hopeless. We have a wonderfully different posture now. We can hold our heads up high; we are not like animals at all. It matters not if some would debate whether our DNA is as the animals or not; we *shall* not care. We know that we are *not* like the animals and we don't have to live like them. We are called to care for one another in a way which we do not yet fully understand. Do you remember when Jesus asked, at the beginning of this tract, "What do you think?" (spoken to us), "If you had a hundred sheep and you lost one, would you go looking for it?" In the light of our discussion, what would you do now? For me, I know the answer to that question. Civilization is changed because of Him and now because of us, the Christianos, the people in whom God dwells. There is hope in the earth because of Him and now today because of us. The Philistine is doomed.

Goliath's days are numbered. The spirit that seeks to elevate one man over another in order to destroy him is finished. He isn't going to live forever; we are! Our enemy is only here for a designated time frame. I am so thankful the Lord has saved me; He is my Good Shepherd. But I'm also thankful that He's called me into *this* calling, to protect and look after His sheep. This church gives to Operation Christmas Child, also to an orphanage in the Philippines, and then to all kinds of other ministries. Why do we do these things? Because we love one another; because we are called to be just like Him.

I don't know about you, but there is a part of me that is still "dog eat dog," a part of me where I've just got to get ahead, I've got to promote myself, be successful, etc. There is so much yet in me that I need to *die* to. As I said earlier, He must increase; I must decrease. That old nature has to be put to death everyday. Even though you've been baptized in water, you still need to consider the old nature as dead, desert it, walk away from it. When you've been cruel (am I the only one, saying a harsh word to my wife or child), are you quick to humble yourself? My wife said to me, "Sometimes you are hard to live with!" Well we all are, but when we defend ourselves in a combative posture, we need to die to that. So let us take up our cross; let us now follow after the Lord. We have been changed and we now have hope in Him.

If this message has challenged you and you want God's change to occur in you, let's pray:

Thank You, Lord. At this time of Christmas, Lord, we sing so many songs about the child in Bethlehem who brought peace into this world. We know now that peace can only happen one way, by Your life in us, by receiving You and following after You. This teaching about caring for the one, this teaching about loving one another instead of only oneself, has changed our life, O God. I pray it will continue to do so, that our posture will not always be defensive but will be aggressive towards the things You have for us to accomplish, whether it's to give to an orphanage in the Philippines, or to Operation Christmas Child, or any of the other things we give to and work in, even here in this city. We know it is Your heart we are after. We ask You, Lord, to forgive us of our own posture when we let the old nature rise up. We ask You to bring Your resurrection life into us that we might walk in that life, as ours, our inheritance in You. We thank You; we finally have a hope. Our hope is in You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

