

Matthew 18:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

Analysis

And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Jesus's parable of the lost sheep climaxes with this stunning statement about divine joy. The conditional "if so be" (ἐὰν γένηται, *ean genētai*, "if it happens") acknowledges the search's uncertainty, yet the shepherd persists. When he "find it" (εὑρη, *heurē*), the verb implies successful search after diligent effort—not accidental discovery but purposeful rescue.

"He rejoiceth more" (χαίρει... μᾶλλον, *chairei... mallon*) describes disproportionate joy—not equal celebration but greater joy over one recovered than ninety-nine safe. This offends human calculation but reveals God's heart. The safe sheep matter, but the shepherd's joy intensifies over the one rescued from danger. This doesn't diminish the ninety-nine's value but highlights recovery's special cause for celebration. The verb χαίρει (*rejoices*) appears in present tense—ongoing, exuberant joy.

"Than of the ninety and nine which went not astray" (ἢ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα τοῖς μὴ πεπλανημένοις, *ē epi tois enenēkonta ennea tois mē peplanēmenois*) contrasts the wandering one with those who "have not gone astray." The verb πλανᾶω (*planaō*) means to wander, go astray, be deceived—describing both physical wandering and spiritual error. This parable teaches God's passionate pursuit of the lost, His joy over repentance (Luke 15:7, 10), and the infinite value

of every individual soul. Each person matters supremely to God; none is expendable or insignificant.

Historical Context

This parable appears in Matthew's discourse on church relationships and discipline (Matthew 18), providing theological foundation for pursuing straying members. Luke's parallel (15:3-7) sets it in context of Pharisees criticizing Jesus for receiving sinners. Both contexts reveal God's character: He actively seeks the lost rather than waiting passively. Ancient Near Eastern shepherding involved personal knowledge of each sheep and willingness to risk danger for any that wandered.

The parable addresses the "little ones" (v. 6, 10, 14)—weak believers susceptible to stumbling. The Father's will is "that one of these little ones should perish" (v. 14). Church discipline (v. 15-20) aims at restoration, not merely punishment—pursuing wanderers like the shepherd pursues lost sheep. The early church applied this by excommunicating the unrepentant while praying for their return (1 Corinthians 5:5). The Reformers emphasized God's electing grace that ensures He will recover His chosen sheep—none will be lost (John 6:39, 10:27-29).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's disproportionate joy over recovering one lost sinner challenge your perspective on evangelism and church discipline?
2. What does this parable teach about the proper balance between caring for the faithful majority and pursuing the straying minority?
3. How should the certainty that the Good Shepherd will find His sheep affect your assurance of salvation and perseverance?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἔὰν γένηται εὗρεῖν αὐτῷ ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι
And if so be that he find it verily I say unto you G3754
G2532 G1437 G1096 G2147 G846 G281 G3004 G5213

χαίρει ἐπὶ αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπὶ τοῖς
he rejoiceth of it more sheep than of which
G5463 G1909 G846 G3123 G2228 G1909 G3588

ἐννενηκονταεννέα τοῖς μὴ πεπλανημένοις
the ninety and nine which not astray
G1768 G3588 G3361 G4105

Additional Cross-References

James 2:13 (Parallel theme): For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Zephaniah 3:17 (Parallel theme): The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.