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2025 Christmas / Luke 15:1–7

Introduction: The Silence We Don't Talk About

(The Familiar Silence): "As we approach Christmas, our thoughts often drift to the familiar words of that old carol: *Silent Night*. We hear the phrase 'All is calm, all is bright,' and it paints a picture in our minds of a world at rest. We love the idea of it because it feels peaceful. It feels safe."

(The Real Silence): "But there is another kind of silence that isn't peaceful at all. It's the silence of the phone that doesn't ring. The silence of the empty chair at the table. The silence of a marriage where words have run out. The silence of a prayer that feels like it's hitting the ceiling. That isn't the silence of peace; that is the silence of **isolation**."

"When Jesus describes us as 'lost sheep' in Luke 15, He isn't painting a picture of a 'calm and bright' meadow. He is describing a sheep separated from the flock, alone in the wilderness, surrounded by darkness. For a sheep, silence isn't a lullaby—it's a threat. It means you are cut off from the only protection you have."

"Christmas is not just a story about a baby sleeping; it is a story about a Shepherd moving. It is the story of a God who refused to leave us in the dark. The message of Luke 15 is this:

Christ left the hosts of heaven to rescue us from the wilderness of the lost

"But to really understand the magnitude of this rescue, we first have to admit where we are. We tend to think we are just 'wandering' or 'searching' for truth. But the Bible is much more honest about our condition. We aren't just looking; we are lost. And we aren't just lost; we are stuck."

I. We Are All Found Trapped in a Wilderness of Silence We Cannot Escape

(Text: Luke 15:4a; Ezekiel 34:6, 12)

A. Lost Sheep Have No Internal Compass With Which to Find Their Way Home

- Biologically, sheep lack the homing instinct found in dogs or cattle. A sheep that is separated from the flock is literally incapable of navigating its way back; it is not just "off track," it is hopelessly lost.
- We must destroy the myth that we can "find God" if we just try hard enough. Like the sheep, we lack the spiritual capacity to navigate the silence. We are dependent on being found.

B. The Greek Word for "Lost" Means "Perishing," Not Just "Misplaced"

- The Greek word Luke uses here is *apolōlos* (from *apollymi*). It is far more violent than our English word "lost." It literally means "to be destroyed" or "to perish." It is the exact same word used in John 3:16 ("...shall not perish but have eternal life").
- The sheep is not just missing from the roll call; it is actively dying. To be isolated from God is not just a lonely state; it is a lethal state. The "silence" of the wilderness isn't peaceful—it is the sound of impending destruction.

Illustration: The "Cast" Sheep

In shepherding, there is a specific and dangerous condition called being "**cast**." This happens when a sheep, often heavy with wool, rolls over on its back to rest and becomes stuck. A cast sheep cannot get up on its own. It flails its legs in the air, but it can't right itself. Within hours, gases build up in its stomach, cutting off circulation and breathing. If the shepherd doesn't arrive quickly, the sheep doesn't just stay stuck—it dies. We are "cast." Isolation leads to destruction.

II. Christ Abandoned the Hosts of Heaven to Chase Down Our Souls

(Text: Luke 15:4b)

A. He Left the Ninety-Nine in Their Safety to Rescue the One in Peril

- In the parable, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine because they are secure in the open country; they are accounted for. His departure is not an abandonment of their safety, but a prioritization of the one who is in mortal danger.
- Christ left the secure to save the insecure. But make no mistake—this was personal.
- You are not a number to God. He didn't calculate the "cost" of the journey; He looked at your value. The Incarnation proves that Jesus would rather leave the absolute security of the hosts of heaven than lose you.

B. He Exchanged the Heavenly Pasture of Communion for the Earthly Wilderness of Isolation

- The shepherd leaves the known "pasture"—a place of provision and community where the flock is fed—to enter the "wilderness" (erēmos), a place of lack, silence, and danger.
- This is the geography of Christmas. Jesus walked away from the pasture of perfect communion—where the hosts of heaven are fully satisfied—to enter the wilderness of our spiritual starvation.
- Christ stepped out of the glory of the provision to step into the silence of our isolation.

Illustration: Father Damien of Molokai

In 1873, Father Damien voluntarily moved to Molokai, a quarantine island for lepers. He knew he could never come back to "healthy" society. He left the safety of the majority to enter the isolation of the minority. After 16 years of serving them, he stood up to preach and said, "**We lepers.**" He had contracted the disease. He became one of them to save them from despair. In the same way, Jesus crossed the quarantine line of sin. He became "sin for us" to break our isolation.

III. The Shepherd Pierced the Thick Darkness to Find Us in Our Isolation

(Text: Luke 15:4b; Ezekiel 34:11-12)

A. The Shepherd's Search Is Not an Attempt; It Is a Relentless Commitment to Find

- The grammar of verse 4 hinges on the word "until" (heōs). The search is not defined by the effort expended or the time elapsed; it is defined solely by the result (heōs). A shepherd who returns without the sheep has failed.
- Jesus did not come to Earth to "offer" salvation; He came to accomplish it.
- Jesus didn't let the darkness of history or the hardness of your heart stop Him.
- Jesus searched through the "clouds and thick darkness" until the isolation was broken.
- Jesus didn't stop until He found you.

B. He Personally Entered the Darkness Because No One Else Could

- In Ezekiel, God promises "I, I Myself." In Luke, the Shepherd does not send a hireling or a sheepdog, which would be less personal, much like He does in Rev. 20:1, when an angel is sent to lock up Satan. Jesus leaves the peace and harmony of heaven itself to make physical contact with the lost because He knows you personally and knows that only He is able to save you.
- We don't worship a God who sends instructions from a distance.
- We worship a God who gets dirt on His hands.
- Jesus crossed the final distance into your isolation to touch you personally.
- Jesus entered the "thick darkness" Himself because He knew that only the Shepherd's voice could wake you from the silence.
- In John 10:27, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." — The rescue succeeds because, in the dark, the sheep recognizes the one Voice that rescues them and keeps them safe.

Jesus doesn't just call them out, He then picks them up, wrapping them around His neck, across both shoulders.

IV. The Shepherd Shoulders the Weight of Our Sin to Carry Us Home

(Text: Luke 15:5-6)

A. Jesus Uses His Strength to Carry What We Ourselves Cannot

- The Greek text specifies that He lays the sheep on his ōmous—the plural form for "shoulders."
- The shepherd doesn't casually drape the sheep over one arm; He centers the weight across both shoulders, using His full strength to encompass and secure the helpless animal.
- We, at some point, must stop trying to carry our own sin, our own salvation, back to the pasture.
- The Gospel is not that Jesus shows you the path; it's that Jesus becomes the transportation.
- Jesus centers the dead weight of your past upon His own strength and carries you out of the wilderness as you rest the weight of your sin on His shoulders.

Illustration: The Thai Cave Rescue

In 2018, when 12 boys were trapped in the flooded cave, the expert divers realized the boys couldn't swim out—panic would kill them. The solution? **They sedated the boys.** They rendered them unconscious "dead weight" and strapped them to the divers' bodies. The boys didn't kick. They didn't swim. They were simply **carried**. This is the Gospel.

We provide the weight; Jesus provides the strength.

And as he carries us out, it is not under duress, it is not a drudgery, it is His joy.

B. He Sings the Song of Joy While Bearing the Burden of the Weight

- The word for "rejoicing" is chairōn, a present participle. This indicates

simultaneous action. He isn't waiting until He gets home to rejoice; He is rejoicing while He is carrying the heavy, dirty, helpless sheep.

- If a sheep repeatedly leaves the flock and gets lost, at times the Shepherd would even break one of the sheep's legs and continue to carry him until the leg is healed, so that the sheep would learn to stay with the shepherd.
- God is not reluctant to save you. He doesn't look at you and sigh at the inconvenience of the Cross. Even while bearing the crushing weight of your sin, His heart is singing.
- The "Silent Night" of your isolation ends not with a lecture, not with a heavy burden that you yourself must bear, but with the Shepherd's care and celebration.

Conclusion: The End of the Silence

- We often think of "Silent Night" as a peaceful song about a quiet baby sleeping. But for the sheep lost in the dark, silence is terrifying. Silence means you are alone. Silence means you are perishing (apollymi).
- But into that terrifying silence, the Shepherd entered. He left the hosts of heaven. He pierced the darkness. He found you in your isolation.
- And because He has found you, and because He is carrying you home rejoicing, you never have to fear the silence again. The silence has been broken by the voice of the Shepherd who says, "I have found my sheep."
- Do not stay in the wilderness. Let Him lift you up. Let Him carry you home.

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1. The "Stop Kicking" Prayer

- The boys in the cave had to be sedated so they wouldn't panic and drown the rescuers.
- "Identify one specific situation in your life where you are thrashing—trying to fix a broken relationship, trying to outwork your guilt, or trying to control a rebellious child. You are exhausted because you are kicking."
- "Take 30 seconds of silence right now. Do not ask God to help you fix it. Instead, pray something like this: 'Lord, I am stopping the kicking. I am becoming dead weight on this issue. You have to carry it, because I can't swim anymore.'"

2. The "Break the Silence" Call

- Christ broke the silence of heaven to find you. We are often the only voice of Jesus people will hear.
- "We all know someone who is in the 'wilderness' of isolation right now—a widow, a shut-in, or a friend who just went through a divorce."
- "Before you sit down for lunch today, take out your phone. Do not text them. Call them. Use your voice to break their silence. Just say, 'I was thinking about you and wanted to see how you are.' Be the Shepherd's voice for someone else today."

Pray

Now let us sing together with the Shepherd, with voices that rejoice with our heavenly Shepherd