

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24

All too often we hear stories about mountain climbers who ventured out on some of the tallest mountains in the world, and didn't return to their **base camp**. They got **lost**, and consequently **search** parties were sent out in order to **find** them. The searchers might be **sherpas** or other experienced climbers. They might be members of the **forest service**, and they might even make use of **airplanes** and **helicopters** to aid in their search. But more often than not, one day passes, then two, then three, and finally the announcement is made that due to the **harsh conditions**, and the failure of efforts to **locate** the climbers, the search has been **called off**.

Today is **Christ the King** Sunday. And as our **King**, Jesus is **concerned** about **His people** who are lost. The LORD speaks with deep **feeling** and **compassion** when He says, *"I will **seek** the lost. I will bring **back** the strays."* Large numbers of people are spiritually **perishing** because of their **sin** and **unbelief**, but the search to **rescue** them from their **lost** condition will **continue** until the end of time. Jesus will not **call off** the search. Until Judgment Day arrives, the LORD will continue to raise up **congregations** and **individuals** who will continue to **Search For The Lost**, and bring them to **Jesus**, their **Savior**. **We** are **included** in that number, so may the Holy Spirit continue to **bless** our efforts as we focus on **Searching For The Lost**.

One of the things which stands out in our text for today, is the LORD's **determination** to **Seek The Lost**. He said, *"I **myself** will seek the **welfare** of my flock and carefully **search** for them ... I will **rescue** them ... I will **gather** them .. I will **shepherd** them ... I will **lead** them ... I will **bind up** the injured ... I will **strengthen** the weak ... I, the **Lord**, have spoken"* These words remind us of **Jesus'** determination to seek and save the lost during the time of His ministry on earth. Do you remember what He said to the **chief tax collector** in Jericho whom He spotted sitting up in a fig tree? Jesus said, *"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for **I must stay** at your house **today**."* Jesus made **no apologies** for inviting Himself to be a guest in the home of this **sinner**, so He could tell him about **His mission** as the Savior. *"The Son of Man came to **seek** and to **save** the **lost**."*

Determination to rescue the **lost** was **also** a key element in Jesus' parable of the **shepherd**. *"If a man has a **hundred** sheep, and **one** of them wanders away, will he not **leave** the ninety-nine on the hills and go looking for the **one** that **wandered away**? ... In the same way, your Father in heaven does not want even **one** of these little ones to **perish**."*

Why was Jesus so **determined** to **Seek The Lost**? It was because Jesus saw **all people** as we really **are**. Jesus knew that **sin** had infected **all** of us, and had **ruined** our minds and spirits. We were all like **sheep** who had gone **astray**. Instead of loving **God** first, we focused our love on **ourselves**. Sin **separated** us from God, so that we found ourselves living to please the desires of our own **sinful flesh**, instead of pleasing our **God**. In fact, we became **so lost** that we couldn't find our way **back** to God. We were without **hope**, without **life**, and on our way to **perishing** in hell **eternally**. That's what it really **means** to be **lost**. And that's exactly the way **Jesus saw us**. He looked at the crowds of people in Israel who had no one to teach them **God's Word**, and He said they were "*like sheep without a shepherd*" - easy **prey** for **Satan** to carry them away and **destroy** them. But Jesus was determined to **rescue** them, and to bring them **His saving Word**. Jesus sees you and me with that **same** determination, because we were **also** spiritually **lost** - "*separate from Christ ... without hope and without God.*"

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Jesus spoke those words as He was walking to Jerusalem to face His **death** by **crucifixion**. He walked that path **determined** to give His **life** as the payment for the sins of the world. Our **King**, who is also our Good **Shepherd**, laid down **His life** for His sheep. Jesus Himself is the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life**. No one comes to the Father, except **through Him**.

Through Jesus the sheep who were **lost** have been **found**, picked up, **held** tightly, **washed** clean of sin, and **returned** to the **safety** of God's sheepfold - His **family**. Through His Word we have been **restored** to an intimate **relationship** with God. With determination Jesus **searched** for us and **found** us, and in baptism He **came** to us, bringing us His **salvation**, and a **rebirth**, making us dearly loved **children** of God, and **permanent** members of His family.

And that's not the **end** of it either. The LORD is **still** determined to reach even **more** of the people who are lost. There are still **many** people in our world who don't have Jesus in their hearts through faith. And the Bible clearly tells us that "*The one who does not have the **Son of God** does not have **life**.*" People who are **lost** are **everywhere**. They include really **nice** people - people who share **themselves** and their **resources** - but who unfortunately believe that **their** hard work and kindness will **earn** them a place in heaven. They include really **smart** people - people who unfortunately don't believe that heaven and hell **exist** - or who don't believe that sin, judgment, and eternity are **realities**, so they think they don't

need a Savior. They're just living for the **here** and **now**. And they are **lost** - lost **eternally**.

But the LORD is **determined** to **reach** them. That's why He's allowing this world to **continue**, so that **more** of the **lost** may be **found**, and brought to saving **faith** in **Jesus**. That's why God continues to provide us with His **Word**, so that through the working of the Holy Spirit we may be moved to **join** the **search party** for the lost. He says to us, "**Go into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come in, so that my house may be filled.**" He says, "**Go and gather disciples from all nations.**" And Jesus can command us to **do this** because He Himself is leading the way. He says, "**I myself will seek the welfare of my flock and carefully search for them.**" That's the God we **worship** and **serve** - a **loving** God - a **selfless** God - a **gracious** God. May His determination overcome any hesitation that **we** have, and inspire us to bring **Christ** and the salvation He **won**, to those who are lost.

God's love for the lost is **amazing**. Paul expressed it this way to the Romans, "*At the appointed time, when we were still **helpless**, Christ **died** for the **ungodly**. It is rare indeed that someone will die for a **righteous** person. Perhaps someone **might** actually go so far as to die for a person who has been **good** to him. But **God** shows his **own** love for us in **this**: While we were still **sinners**, Christ **died** for us.*" Think of that in terms of the **business** world. The board of control of a big company is looking for a new **CEO**. So, they hire a firm to find the right person to fill the position. This firm hears about an individual with a great **management** record, so they decide to go after him. They fly a couple **thousand** miles to the other coast, and spend **hundreds** of dollars for hotel rooms, car rentals, and restaurant meals. The next day they **meet** with the person they're hoping to hire, but to their **disappointment** they find him to be **arrogant**, **self-centered**, and totally **unsuitable** for the job - not at all what they were **hoping** to find. What a **waste** of their **time** and **resources**. If only they had known the **truth** about him from the very start.

But in God's search for the **lost**, He already **knew** the truth about us. Before Jesus took a single step toward the **cross**, He already **knew** what our character was like. He knew that we were **critical**, **selfish**, and **disobedient**. God wasn't looking for **nice**, **warm-hearted**, **friendly** people - He was looking for **sinners**. And there's only **one reason** why He would **bother** to look for them. That **reason** is His **love**. The Good Shepherd **searched** for us, and **found** us, and **cradled** us in His arms, and **cleansed** us from all our sins. Have we looked at His **hands**? They have **scars** from the nails which pierced Him. Have we considered His **heart** - a

heart full of **love** that covered **our sins** with **His righteousness**, and secured us in His **embrace** now and forever. “*Christ loved us and gave himself for us.*”

And that same love still flows from Jesus’ heart as His unending **Search For The Lost** continues. It’s with **love** that Jesus says, “*Other sheep I have who are not of this sheep pen. They too must hear my voice; them also I must bring, and there will be one flock and one shepherd.*” It’s with love for the lost that Jesus commands us, “*Go and preach the gospel to every creature.*” When you hear the word **evangelism** or **outreach**, does the **love of Jesus** come to mind? I hope so, because the Savior wants us to share His word of salvation with **everyone**. He loves **all** people, and wants them **all** to become His sheep. May the love of Jesus always shine brightly in our **Search For The Lost**.

Remember the **love** of Jesus - love that He has generously poured into our hearts. In His own words Jesus said, “*I will search for my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered.*” That’s the **determination** and **love** of our Savior. May our hearts **see** it, **feel** it, and be **inspired** by it, so that when the LORD asks for volunteers to join His **search party** for the lost, we will be ready to **respond** by saying, “*Here am I. Send me.*” Amen.