

Returned with Interest – I Peter 2:21-25

I. Introduction:

- A. My primary interest this morning is the last verse in this chapter.
1. *“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”*
 2. You saints of God should live unto righteousness now that you have been brought to Christ – the One who carried our sins away in His own body on the cross.
- B. For the sake of argument, let’s say that Peter was remembering the testimonies of his friends in Asia.
1. Perhaps those people had spoken of their former false religions – filled with idolatry and approbation of sin.
 2. They described how they had been crushed by guilt and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, when they heard about the sacrifice of Christ.
 3. Others recounted how they were overcome & drawn by the love of God as expressed on Calvary.
 4. Some pointed out they were so lost in the wilderness of sin, they didn’t even know they were lost.
 - a. But the Saviour left His ninety-and-nine and went out looking for them.
 - b. And when He found them, He threw them onto His shoulders and carried them back to His home.
 5. Every one of those people had a different story to tell, but the root elements were all the same:
 - a. They were taught by the Holy Spirit to see their damnable sins, and then they were given a revelation of the righteousness and sacrifice of the Saviour.
 - b. They repented before God, acknowledging their sinful condition, and they put their faith in Christ to forgive them of their sins and bring them safely before God the Father.
- C. As Peter thought back on their words of testimony, he paraphrased their comments with the words of our text.
1. *“Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”*
 2. This morning, let’s analyze this wonderful scripture.
 3. Of course, it is presented to us as an illustration of the Christian’s new standing in Christ.
 4. But if you are not a child of God, may it show you who you are now and what you could be in the Lord.

II. Let’s begin at the beginning. WHO was Peter talking about?

- A. *“For YE were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”*
1. Obviously, Peter is talking **about** the people **to whom** this letter was written.
 2. He describes them several times and in several ways in the first two chapters.
 3. They were now **Christian** people, *“elect according to the foreknowledge of God.”*
 4. They had been **begotten again** unto God’s lively hope, to an **incorruptible inheritance** in Christ.
 5. They had been **redeemed** with the **precious blood** of Christ, which they had **received by faith**.
 6. Each were now a part of a **chosen generation**, a royal **priesthood**, an holy **nation** & a **peculiar people**.
 7. They were at the time of Peter’s epistle, **the people of God**, but in **time past** they were **not a people**.
- B. There are two kinds of people in the world.
1. There are sheep who are going astray, and there are sheep who are tucked away in Christ’s sheepfold, safely protected by the Saviour Christ, who is also the doorway to that special place.
 2. Everyone of us are, in a sense, the sheep of God, but some are lost and some are saved.
 3. The vast majority of people in the world think little of Jehovah and Christ Jesus, and they have no desire to be in the Lord’s fold.
 - a. But then there are those few who would be willing to die for the Saviour.
 - b. They would be willing to become sacrifices for the Lord’s glory.
 4. Peter was writing to this second group.
 5. **But** they were not born that way, and for most of their lives, they had not been that kind of people.

III. When Peter says, “Ye WERE” he points to the past – to a time WHEN...

- A. The Bible uses several terms and illustrations to speak of the condition in which we come into this world.
1. In **Ephesians 2**, Paul describes us as “*dead in trespasses and sins.*”
 - a. Being dead, we all need spiritual life. There is spiritual life and there is physical life.
 - b. As people spiritually dead, we need to be regenerated or born again – born from above.
 2. In that same scripture we are described as previously being “*children of disobedience, walking according to the prince of the power of the air.*”
 3. Who is that prince of the air?
 - a. The Lord Jesus clarifies that by saying we come into this world as **children of Satan**.
 - b. He said, “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.*”
 4. Those lusts are also a part of what Paul was telling the **Ephesians**: “*We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh.*”
 5. Still in **Ephesians** Paul adds that non-Christians are **children of wrath**.
 - a. That doesn’t mean we all had anger issues and were in need of psychological counseling.
 - b. It means that as sinners we were under the ominous black cloud of the eternal wrath of God.
 6. “**BUT** God... *is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.*”
- B. God “*commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”
1. Yet sinners? What does the apostle mean by that? Aren’t Christians still sinners? We are.
 2. As long as we remain in the world, living in this physical flesh, we are vulnerable to temptation, and we will sin.
 3. But now, as sinners graciously enwrapped in Christ’s righteousness, the Lord sees us differently.
 4. We **were** sinners, but **now** we are saints – sanctified people.
 5. And now, as both Peter and Paul tell us, we **SHOULD live**.... we **MUST live** righteously in thanksgiving to God for His saving grace.

IV. “Ye were as SHEEP going ASTRAY” – speaking of WHERE we have all been.

- A. This reference to sheep is an old illustration, imbedded in the mind-set of God’s Old Testament people, Israel.
1. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had flocks of sheep.
 - a. They were shepherds by occupation. That is what Jacob told the Egyptian pharaoh.
 2. When Israel left Egypt they went out with flocks of sheep and goats, much of which were given to them by the Egyptian people.
 3. David was a shepherd before he became a king, and in that he was a picture of the future Messiah.
 4. Jesus, the Messiah, described himself as “*the good shepherd*” in **John 10**.
 - a. He said, “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*”
 5. When **Isaiah** described us in **chapter 53**, the people of Israel could easily picture what he was saying.
 - a. “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one his own way...*”
 6. And when **Jesus** spoke of the shepherd with a hundred sheep the people could easily grasp the picture.
- B. **Domesticated sheep** are notorious for several **weaknesses**.
1. First, they have absolutely **nothing** with which to **defend** themselves.
 - a. They have no fangs or claws, and they have short legs.
 - b. They aren’t particularly fast runners; they are defenseless.
 - c. Males may have horns, but they are used primarily to determine who is the top ram in the flock.
 - d. When the wolf attacks, those big rams run away just as fast as the ewes.
 2. Second, sheep are notable for their **fear**.
 - a. They are known to become paralyzed and sometimes to die from fright.
 - b. A strange, barking dog can kill sheep without touching them.
 - c. Even if the sheep **could** defend themselves with their horns, they’d rather run than fight.
 3. Third, despite being herd animals, they are **prone wander**, following their noses in the hope of finding better grass than that to which their shepherd had led them. They are **easily lost**.

4. And a fourth characteristic is that they **aren't built** with a **homing device**.
 - a. They may follow their noses, taking a bit of grass, then another, and another until they are lost.
 - b. But they can't follow their noses to get back home. Their sense of smell isn't built like that.
 5. Together these things mean that the individual lamb or sheep is prone to become separated from the rest of the flock, running from its own shadow or looking for greener pastures.
- C. I suggested a few minutes ago that **David**, the future king of Israel, began serving his father as a shepherd.
1. In so many ways, David is a type, or picture, of our Lord Jesus. But that isn't my theme this morning.
 2. But I do want to consider something David once said to Saul, who was then the king of Israel.
 3. The nation was being harassed by the Philistine army, and at the head of that military spear was Goliath.
 4. David said in regard to Goliath, *"Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:*
 - a. *And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.*
 - b. *Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God."*
- D. Incidental to David's statement about Goliath were these attacks upon his father's sheep.
1. I don't believe I am doing any injustice to the scripture to say that the most vulnerable of the sheep are those that go astray.
 2. A good shepherd, like David, is ever alert, watching for bears, lions, eagles and other predators.
 3. When he is overseeing a hundred head, he may not be aware of what is falling on the wanderer, until it is crying out in pain or fear.
 4. Before the lion's attack, that sheep may be as silent as a lamb, wandering away, completely unaware of its danger.
 5. It's the sheep who is astray who is in the most danger.
 6. David must leave his ninety-and-nine to rescue the wanderer from the jaws of the lion.
- E. You probably don't share my delight in researching the original words of the scriptures, but I'm going to continue enticing you with those little nuggets.
1. The words *"gone astray"* are also translated *"to err,"* as in *"to make a horrible mistake."*
 2. But more importantly, it is five times more often translated *"to deceive"* or *"to be deceived."*
 3. Why has this sheep gone astray, away from the Lord, the Shepherd, and His loving care?
 4. Because she has believed the lies which suggested that the Shepherd was not the best thing in her life.
 5. She believed that the grass was greener on the sinful side of the road.
 6. She believed that she was wise enough to make her own decisions, and that she was smart enough to avoid the lions and the bears.
- F. You may have buddies who suggest they know more about sin, righteousness and judgment than God does.
1. They do not. Don't listen to them when they tell you that Christianity is for fools, and that life ends with the grave, or that God will eventually take everyone into His heavenly sheepfold.
 2. The Lord Jesus spoke about thieves and false shepherds who were in the sheep business only to suit themselves.
 - a. *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."*
 - b. *"The thief cometh not, but for to seal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life..."*
 - c. Others are hirelings, *"whose own the sheep are not, (they) seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth..."*
 3. In contrast, Christ said, *"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."*
 4. He gives His life for the sheep, not only by risking His life to retrieve them, but by actually dying to redeem them.

- G. Where were these sheep before the Shepherd left the rest of His flock to look for them?
1. In addition to being born with a propensity to wander, they actually and deliberately listened to the lies of others and to those of their own hearts, and they went astray.
 2. They were so far astray that only the Shepherd could bring them back.

V. **WHAT exactly happened to them?**

- A. They were **returned** to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.
- B. At some point early in Christ's ministry, He and his disciples were walking to a certain village when a poor, lonely, diseased, woman crept up behind them and reached out to touch the hem of the Lord's robe.
1. She believed that if she did that, then the energy and power of God would heal her, changing her life.
 2. As she did, immediately, Jesus *"turned him about,"* and said, *"Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole."*
- C. Jesus *"turned him about"* – that is the word Peter used in our scripture.
1. The word is translated *"returned,"* and *"turned about"* meaning *"turned around."*
 2. But one out of every five times the word is found in the Greek Bible it is translated *"to be converted."*
 3. **This** is the word Peter used during his message on the Day of Pentecost – *"Repent ye therefore, and be **CONVERTED**, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" – Acts 3:19.*
 4. What if we inserted those other words into our scripture?
 - a. *"Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now **turned about** unto the Shepherd & Bishop of your souls."*
 5. Or, *"ye were as sheep going astray; but are **now CONVERTED** unto the Shepherd."*
- D. What I'd like you to see is that this return to Christ is far more radical than we might casually think.
1. Most people, hearing of Jesus' leaving the ninety-and-nine to find the one lost sheep, visualize an animal who is utterly spent and anxious to be restored to the sheep fold.
 2. That is a reasonably good image, and very preachable, but it isn't demanded by the text.
 3. Just as accurate might be the unwillingness of that sheep to admit to her lostness and her need to return.
 4. Not only does the Shepherd lift His sheep onto His shoulders and carry her home, but He gives her a new heart to love the Shepherd and to yearn for His sheepfold.
 5. Before this wayward animal has any desire to be with the Shepherd, she must be **converted**.
 6. As I just said, **this** was Peter's message to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost.
 - a. *"Repent ye therefore, and be **CONVERTED**, that your sins may be blotted out..."*
- E. But let's lay that aside and stick strictly with our English version – *"are now returned."*
1. Isn't it necessary to have **been somewhere** before we can **return** to that place?
 2. My wife and I are **planning to return** to Knoxville, Tennessee in a few weeks, where our son and his family live, and where we have visited three or four times.
 3. We might also drive down to the Charleston and the South Carolina coast, but we **can't return** to Charleston, because we've never been there before.
- F. These Christians in Pontus and Galatia *"are returned"* to the divine Shepherd who created them.
1. In the very beginning, about 6,000 years ago, humanity came from the creative hand of Jehovah.
 2. Every man, woman & child in this world... people of every race and every nationality were created by God.
 3. You could properly say that we all lived for a while in Eden, when we were still in our initial parents.
 4. But then *"all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one his own way..."*
 5. Despite being the created property of Jehovah, our parents wandered away, and we wandered in them.
 6. In a **legal sense**, we all belong to Jehovah, and in a **practical sense**, in conversion, **we return** to Him.

- G. And notice, *“we are returned unto the Shepherd.”*
1. Does my ear hear that we are **passive** in this return?
 2. Might I say that the Shepherd is doing all the work of returning us?
 3. Don't we see Him going after His sheep, *“looking for that which is lost, until he find it?”*
 4. It is the Lord who does all the work of returning the lost sheep to His sheepfold.

VI. And to **WHOM** have we been returned? *“To the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.”*

- A. Probably your Bible has capitalized the words *“Shepherd”* and *“Bishop.”*
1. That denotes that they are speaking of God.
 2. More specifically, they are speaking of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. In **John 10** Christ said, *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”*
 - a. *“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*
 - b. *As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”*
 - c. *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*
 - d. *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”*
- B. When Peter said that these people were returned unto their Shepherd, they may have remembered **Psalm 23**. *“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: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”*
1. In addition to *“Shepherd,”* Peter called Christ *“the Bishop of our souls,”* referring to an **overseer**.
 2. Together, the shepherd and overseer suggest feeding and protecting those sheep.
 3. They speak of guidance and management of the flock.
 4. Together they cover all that we really need after the Lord has saved our souls.

VII. Conclusion

- A. In our early lives, we were untamed, wild, wilful creatures; sheep having gone astray.
1. I am speaking about every single one of us. *“ALL we like sheep have gone astray.”*
 2. But the gracious Shepherd went out of His way, using His voice to call us.
 3. He said in **John 10** – *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”*
 4. By God's grace and power those believers to whom Peter was writing had heard the voice of God, and they knew the voice, responding to it, and they found within themselves a new willingness to follow Him.
 5. Their hearts were changed; they were born again.
- B. Perhaps you are one of the people to whom the Lord is speaking this morning.
1. Do you recognized that voice? Is the Lord talking to your soul? Is He calling your name?
 2. Yes, that voice may sound a little intimidating right now.
 3. It may actually be pointing out your sinfulness and lostness, making you feel miserable.
 4. But listen again.
 5. Can't you hear the Lord saying, *“Come unto me all ye that labor & are heavy laden and I will give you rest?”*
 6. Can't you hear Him say, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved?”*
- C. Christ's sheep hear His voice, because He knows them, loves them and individually calls them.
1. Do you hear Him this morning?
 2. Will you follow Him in faith and repentance?