

Snares & the Parable of the Lost Sheep

To Be Like Yeshua Means - To Understand Who Is the Greatest in The Kingdom

In my last post, we began a new mini-series from the Christian Torah focusing on who is greatest in the Kingdom. We first looked at the notion that we need to become like little children. In this post, Yeshua continues to warn us against the snares in life.

I closed my last post with the following:

Snares will always be a danger to Yeshua's talmidim in their time on earth - whether they come from the fellowship (18:6), the world (18:7), or – as we will see in verses 8 - 9 the sinful nature itself (18:8-9). As Yeshua had explained in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, the weeds will exist until the end of the age, so evil and its accompanying temptation to sin will be ever-present problems for Yeshua's followers.

Snares (continued)

"So if your hand or foot becomes a snare for you, cut it off and throw it away! Better that you should be maimed or crippled and obtain eternal life than keep both hands or both feet and be thrown into everlasting fire! And if your eye is a snare for you, gouge it out and fling it away! Better that you should be one-eyed and obtain eternal life than keep both eyes and be thrown into the fire of Gei-Hinnom. ¹ See that you never despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually seeing the face of my Father in heaven. ^{*2} For the Son of Man came to save the lost." Matthew 18:8-11 (CJB)

With strong language (not meant to promote self-mutilation), Yeshua described how the talmidim should renounce anything that would cause them to be entrapped (to sin) or turn away from the faith. The action of surgically cutting sin out of their lives should be prompt and complete in order to keep them from sin. Temptation to sin can come from various sources. In the Bible, **hands** with accomplishments and **feet** are often associated with traveling to do evil.

Eyes were associated with vision or desires of the heart, aspirations, or ambitions. All who desire to follow Yeshua must remove any stumbling blocks that cause sin. Yeshua did not mean to literally cut off a part of the body; he meant that any relationship, practice, or activity that leads to sin should be stopped. As a person would submit to losing a diseased appendage (hand or foot) or a sense (sight) in order to save his or her life, so Believers should be just as willing to **cut off** any temptation, habit, or part of their nature that could lead them to hold on to this world and turn away from Yeshua and into sin. If you are a gambler, you don't go to Vegas and then pray for deliverance from your addiction when you walk into the casino.

Just cutting off a limb that committed sin or gouging out an eye that looked lustfully would still not get rid of sin, for that must begin in the heart and mind. Yeshua was saying that people need to take drastic action to keep from stumbling. This also applies to the corporate responsibility of Believers and includes excommunicating those who would lead others astray (the P'rushim in Yeshua's time). Anyone who presents a stumbling block to the Believers must be **cut off** from the fellowship. The reason? Yeshua explained that it would be better to have lost some worldly possession, attitude, or action than to keep it and **be thrown into**

¹ The Valley of Gei-Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where children had been sacrificed by fire to the pagan god Molech (see 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35). Later, during the reign of good King Josiah, the valley was used as the city's garbage dump (2 Kings 23:10) where fire burned constantly to destroy the garbage and the worms infesting it. Thus, "Gei-Hinnom" accurately described the place of **eternal fire** (Matthew 5:22; 10:28; Luke 12:5; James 3:6; Revelation 19:20) that has been prepared for the devil, his angels, and all those who do not know Yeshua (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:9-10). This will be the final and eternal state of the wicked after the resurrection and the Last Judgment.

² * Some manuscripts add verse 11 as stated above.

the eternal fire because of it. This is true, radical discipleship. While no person will be completely sin-free until Heaven, God wants an attitude that renounces sin instead of one that holds on to sin.

"See that you never despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually seeing the face of my Father in heaven." This verse is found only in Matthew and bridges from the concept of leading the **little ones** astray to seeking them when they do go astray (see also 18:6). As I've alluded to before, **little ones** can refer to both the children and Yeshua's talmidim. The words **never despise** pointed directly at the pious religious leaders who showed nothing but contempt for those below them on the **"spiritual ladder"** (for example, Luke 18:9-14 about the P'rushim and the tax collector). The reason the **little ones** should not be despised is because **their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven**.

Some have seen in these verses the concept of guardian angels. These words neither prove nor condemn the concept. Seeing God's face means having access to God, so these angels are ministering angels (see Hebrews 1:14). The Tanakh does not speak about guardian angels assigned to God's people, but it does speak of angelic intercession and help (as in Psalm 91:11). Also, in Daniel 10:10-14, angels watch over nations. The meaning here is that God's people are constantly represented before the Father; therefore, each one of us has special importance. The writer of Hebrews said, **"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"** (Hebrews 1:14). However, any investigation of angels should keep in mind that it is God's care that they administer, so the focus should be on God, not merely angels (see also Luke 15:10; 16:22).

Parable of the Lost Sheep

"What's your opinion? What will somebody do who has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away? Won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillsides and go off to find the stray? And if he happens to find it? Yes! I tell you he is happier over it than over the ninety-nine that never strayed! Thus your Father in heaven does not want even one of these little ones to be lost."
Matthew 18:12-14 (CJB)

The differences between this parable as recorded by Matthew and that recorded by Luke 15:1-7 are important. In Luke's context, the words were addressed to the religious leaders who objected to Yeshua's dealings with undesirables (such as the tax collector). In Luke's account, the sheep is **lost**; in Matthew's account, the sheep **wanders away**. Here, Yeshua was addressing not his opponents but his talmidim, reminding them that God's care extends to each of his **little ones** (here portrayed as **sheep**). If a sheep should go astray from the flock, God, like a protective **shepherd**, will **go off to find the stray**. God is concerned about every single Believer and will actively go in search of those who have **"gone astray."**

The sheep went astray, but the shepherd sought after it. **If he finds it ... he rejoices over it.** The love for the little lost sheep is not at the expense of the rest of the flock. That the shepherd left the **ninety-nine** behind should not be pressed to mean that he leaves them unprotected. As I've said before, not every detail of a parable must be pressed. The point is that the Father does not want any of his flock to wander away.

Yeshua explained that **"thus your Father in heaven does not want even one of these little ones to be lost."** God so loves each of his followers that, should they go astray, He actively seeks and rejoices when they return to him. Just as a shepherd is concerned enough about one lost sheep to go search the hills for it, so God is concerned about every believer no matter how small or weak his or her faith might be – **"It is not his purpose that anyone should be destroyed..."** 2 Peter 3:9 (CJB). What wonderful love! God rejoicing in us! God rejoicing when a **lost** person is **found!** And God wants faithful Believers - **US** - to be part of the rescue team. Our follow-through care of new Believers, our small group ministry, and our individual contact with fellow Believers should demonstrate the Great Shepherd's care for his sheep.

In my next post, we will be looking at what Yeshua has to say about honesty.