

## WHO ARE THE LOST SHEEP? by Carl McMurray

In Luke 15:2 the Pharisees and the scribes are grumbling because Jesus seems to be spending time with and teaching those whom they have determined to be sinners; rather than keeping aloof from them as was their own practice. Jesus' response to their attitude is found in verses 4-7. *"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he find it?"* He concludes in verse 7 by saying, *"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."* Does this parable have any application for us today? Most assuredly. Then we must ask, who is this "one sinner" that needs to repent? Who is it that heaven is so concerned about? Because if heaven is that concerned, and rejoices when that one repents, then I should be concerned also and I want to share in that rejoicing. Who is this one "lost sheep?"

It is the one who has turned back to the world. It is the brother or sister who has been discouraged and gave up, or the one who has been tempted into sin and now is ashamed to confess it, or the one who has grown lukewarm. There will be some who are lost to the kingdom. Those who have been marked as unfaithful should not be forgotten. How many have been rescued from death at almost the last minute, because some stubborn searcher did not quit searching when others wished too? There are many of our number in towns across this nation that we have stopped looking for. Perhaps there must come a time when that is the reality of their impenitence, they are gone! There are other times however, when we just give up too soon. With a heavy heart on more than one occasion, I have sat and listened to some brother who is deep in sin declare that not one person had expressed any concern for his soul when he was falling. Once again, perhaps this was an excuse and perhaps it is a failing on our part to see as far as the Master would have. These are lost sheep.

It is our friend, our neighbor, our co-worker, and our loved one. Jesus said that he had other sheep that were not of that fold. He was speaking of the gentiles, those that lacked the access to the Law of God that the Jews had been privy to. It is the same attitude of concern that is found in Acts 18:10, when the Lord told Paul that he had "many people" in the city of Corinth. These people were not Christians, but they were good people, sincere and loving. They were people who might resist the gospel at first, but whose intellectual honesty would make them consider it. They were people like your friends and mine, who need to take an evening and just consider the Bible as God's word. Someone needs to ask them to do that - point blank. Someone needs to be searching for them, because heaven is concerned. There are teachers available - will you ask your associates to study? These are lost sheep.

It is those outside our borders of freedom and democracy that have been denied a hearing by previous generations. A few years ago I was offered the opportunity to travel with a friend of mine, a native Nigerian who was returning home for a visit. My purpose would have been to preach and teach

in his village and surrounding areas. I turned down the support that was offered and canceled the trip because of some small stir in the congregation. What was the stir, you ask? Well, some were saying things like, "Why spend money on Nigeria when we haven't even reached everyone here yet?" and "Why should the church pay for the preacher to have a vacation in Africa?" (Can you imagine a "vacation" in Nigeria?) As a young preacher, I had neither the wisdom nor the experience to discern the depth of ignorance that was being expressed in those words. I thought simply that I should avoid troubling the local work. I was wrong. Those brethren needed some troubling. Generations of people in China, Eastern Europe, South America, and other places have been deprived of God's word. They now are literally pleading for it to be taught to them. Talk about a Macedonian call! What stretch of rationalization will allow us to live and meet in comfort while millions of lost sheep cry out from the cliffs edge? Taking the message of salvation in Christ Jesus into the whole world was THE TASK of the apostles. We call it THE GREAT COMMISSION. If we do what the apostles were taught to do (Mt.28:20) we will also be going into the world. If we imitate them like Paul said to do in 1 Cor.11:1, we will be going. And as the preachers of a generations ago were often heard to say, "If you can't go, will you send someone else?" There are those who are willing to endure the food, the travel, the accommodations, the separation and even the danger sometimes, to go. These also are the lost sheep that heaven is concerned about.

All these are hoping for a shepherd to save them. They are crying out often, for shoulders to carry them to safety. They are wishing for friends to welcome them and rejoice over them. Will we help the shepherd? Will it be our shoulders that carry them home? Will we rejoice with heaven now and someday look across the great crowd of saints gathered around the white throne to catch the grin of those whom we helped bring to a knowledge of the Saviour? Could there be a brighter smile? Oh yes, there will be those that grumble. Jesus heard them and so will we - But, Jesus also challenged them with the truth and so should we. They couldn't stop our Lord and they shouldn't stop us. Whether brother or alien sinner, next door or across the sea, shall we not go hand in hand with the Shepherd and search out his sheep. The Lord will bless your efforts.