

THE LESSON APPLIED

The gospel is not the private property of any class, nor of any nation. The Pharisees are criticizing Jesus at the beginning of our Lesson passage for His attitude towards those despised classes in the nation,—the publicans and sinners. And these parables of grace are Jesus' answer to their criticism of Him. The Pharisees refuse to believe that the kingdom of God is for the publicans and sinners. Jesus says that the kingdom of God *is* for them as much as for anybody. God is intensely interested in sinners. The angels are interested in sinners. And that is true of sinners everywhere and at all times; not only in Jesus' day, but in our day; not only in our own land, but in heathen lands as well. That the gospel is not the private property of any nation, is amply proved by the way in which it takes hold of heathen lives. A journalist who visited Japan recently tells us of how he worshiped there with Japanese Christians who had "the same light in their eyes" as Christians at home; and our missionaries continually bear testimony to the many real conversions upon the mission field. The gospel fits in to the needs of men everywhere.

Men are of more value than sheep or money. Why? Because they have souls to be redeemed. And yet there are people who set more value on animals than on men, to judge by their actions, at any rate. And there are certainly people who set more value on money than on men, to judge by their actions. "What man of you will not seek a lost sheep?" Yes, but there are men who care nothing for a lost soul. "What woman will not search diligently for a lost piece of money?" Yes, but there are women who care nothing for a lost soul. The men who are interested in commerce take plenty of trouble to go to the heathen. They sell them goods, and build them railways, and develop their mines. What the Christian church needs is the same intensity in seeking the souls of the heathen as men of commerce show in seeking the money of the heathen. There are some people who are willing to admit the value of souls in our own land, but seem doubtful about the value of souls in heathen lands. And yet one writer on Korea tells us, that he has no hesitation in saying

that the greatest man he ever met was a Korean Christian.

The souls of men belong to God. They belong to God just as the lost sheep belonged to the shepherd, and the lost coin belonged to the woman. We belong to God because He created us in the first place in His own image, because He constantly cares for us by His providence, and, above all else, because He has loved us with an everlasting love. The greatest tragedy in our world is that so many souls have got away from God. They are God's lost property. What made the sheep lost? What made the coin lost? It was the fact that they had got out of proper relationship to those to whom they rightfully belonged. What makes a soul lost? The fact that it is out of proper relationship to God who owns it. And it is just here that we can see where our duty lies as Christians. We have been commissioned by God to help get the lost ones back to Him. He is always seeking them, but He often desires to seek them through us. It was not only the value of the sheep that appealed to the shepherd, it was its misery as well. A missionary writing about the heathen says: "No punishment in the next world can equal the things they miss in this life by a lack of belief in a personal God." It is ours to help bring to these the belief they lack.

It takes trouble to find the lost. The shepherd had to be willing to undergo exposure and toil and danger in order to find the sheep that had gone astray. The woman had to undertake a regular housecleaning in order to find her lost coin. And both of these were glad to take all this trouble because they were so anxious to recover their lost property. God has put part of the task of seeking the lost in the hands of Christians. Well, let us be ready to take trouble about it. The church, for example, is justified in using every available method to reach the heathen. Sometimes preaching can reach them best. Then preachers must be supplied. Sometimes doctors can reach them best. Jews and Moslems in the East refuse to listen to preaching and teaching because of their prejudice against Christianity, but the doctor brings them something which they dare not