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Luke 15:4–7—Lost Sheep

Jesus's parable of the lost sheep is told in Luke 15:4–7:

“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

The parable (another version of the parable is found in Matt. 18:10–14) inspired an 1868 poem by Elizabeth Clephane, “The Ninety and Nine.” The poem tells of the shepherd’s quest to recover the sheep in terms that clearly recall Christ’s passion and suffering for sinners.

The second verse reads:

“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?”
But the Shepherd made answer: “This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me.
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep.”

It was discovered after the poet's death by the evangelist L. Dwight Moody, who was touring Scotland. Moody's music minister, Ira D. Sankey, set the poem to music and it became a beloved hymn for those who appreciated its piety and sentimentality.