

# Metropolitan Tabernacle.

## THE PRODIGAL'S CLIMAX.

### A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 26TH, 1895,

DELIVERED BY

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“When he came to himself.”—Luke xv. 17.

THERE are different stages in the sinner's history, and they are worth marking in the prodigal's experience. There is, first, the stage in which the young man sought independence of his father. The younger son said, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” We know something of that state of mind; and, alas! it is a very common one. As yet there is no open profligacy, no distinct rebellion against God. Religious services are attended, the father's God is held in reverence; but in his heart the young man desires a supposed liberty, he wishes to cast off all restraint. Companions hint that he is too much tied to his mother's apron-string. He himself feels that there may be some strange delights which he has never enjoyed; and the curiosity of Mother Eve to taste the fruit of that tree which was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, comes into the young man's mind, and he wishes to put forth his hand, and take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that he may eat thereof. He never intends to spend his substance in riotous living, but he would like to have the opportunity of spending it as he likes. He does not mean to be a profligate; still, he would like to have the honour of choosing what is right on his own account. At any rate, he is a man now; he feels his blushing honours full upon him, and he wants now to exercise his own freedom of will, and to feel that he himself is really his own master. Who, indeed, he asks, is Lord over him? Perhaps there are some to whom I am speaking who are just in such a state as that; if so, may the grace of God arrest you before you go any further away from him! May you feel that, to be out of gear with God, to wish to be separated from him, and to have other interests than those of him who made you, must be dangerous, and probably will be fatal! Therefore now, even now, may you come

to yourself at this earliest stage of your history, and also come to love and rejoice in God as the prodigal returned to his father!

Very soon, however, this young man in the parable entered upon quite another stage. He had received his portion of goods; all that he would have had at his father's death he had turned into ready money, and there it is. It is his own, and he may do what he pleases with it. Having already indulged his independent feeling towards his father, and his wish to have a separate establishment altogether from him, he knew that he would be freer to carry out his plans if he was right away. Anywhere near his father there is a check upon him; he feels that the influence of his home somewhat clips his wings. If he could get into a far country, there he should have the opportunity to develop; and all that evolution could do for him he would have the opportunity of enjoying, so he gathers all together, and goes into the far country. It may be that I am addressing some who have reached that stage. Now there is all the delirium of self-indulgence. Now it is all gaiety, "a short life and a merry one," forgetting the long eternity and a woeful one. Now the cup is full, and the red wine sparkles in the bowl. As yet, it has not bitten you like a serpent, nor stung you like an adder, as it will do all too soon; but just now, it is the deadly sweetness that you taste, and the exhilaration of that drugged chalice that deceives you. You are making haste to enjoy yourself. Sin is a dangerous joy, beloved all the more because of the danger; for, where there is a fearful risk, there is often an intense pleasure to a daring heart; and you perhaps are one of that venturesome band, spending your days in folly and your nights in riotousness.

Ere long there comes a third stage to the sinner as well as to the prodigal, that is when he has "spent all." We have only a certain amount of spending money after all. He who has gold without limit, yet has not health without limit; or if health does not fail him in his sinning, yet desire fails, and satiety comes in, as it did with Solomon when he tried this way of seeking happiness. At last, there is no honey left, there is only the sting of the bee. At last, there is no sweetness in the cup, there is only the delirium that follows the intoxication. At last, the meat is eaten to the bone, and there is nothing good to come out of that bone; it contains no marrow, the teeth are broken with it, and the man wishes that he had never sat down to so terrible a feast. He has reached the stage at which the prodigal arrived when he had spent all. Oh, there be some who spend all their character, spend all their health and strength, spend all their hope, spend all their uprightness, spend everything that was worth having! They have spent all. This is another stage in the sinner's history, and it is very apt to lead to despair, and even deeper sin, and sometimes to that worst of sins which drives a man red-handed before the bar of his Maker to account for his own blood.

It is a dreadful state to be in, for there comes at the back of it a terrible hunger. There is a weary labour to get something that may stay the spirit, a descending to the degradation of feeding swine, a willingness to eat of the husks that swine do eat, yet an inability to do so. Many have felt this craving that cannot be satisfied. But, for my part, I am glad when "the rake's progress" has reached this point; for often, in the grace of God, it is the way home for the prodigal; it is a roundabout way, but it is the way home for him. When men have spent all, and poverty has followed on their recklessness, and sickness has come at the call of their vice,

then it is that omnipotent grace has stepped in, and there has come another stage in the sinner's history, of which I am now going to speak, as God may help me. That is the point the prodigal had reached "when he came to himself."

#### I. Then, first, A SINNER IS BESIDE HIMSELF.

While he is living in his sin, he is out of his mind, he is beside himself. I am sure that it is so. There is nothing more like to madness than sin; and it is a moot point among those who study deep problems how far insanity and the tendency to sin go side by side, and whereabouts it is that great sin and entire loss of responsibility may touch each other. I do not intend to discuss that question at all; but I am going to say that every sinner is morally and responsibly insane, and therefore in a worse condition than if he were only mentally insane.

He is insane, first, because his judgment is altogether out of order. He makes fatal mistakes about all-important matters. He reckons a short time of this mortal life to be worth all his thoughts, and he puts eternity into the background. He considers it possible for a creature to be at enmity against the Creator, or indifferent to him, and yet to be happy. He fancies that he knows better what is right for him than the law of God declares. He dreams that the everlasting gospel, which cost God the life of his own Son, is scarcely worthy of his attention at all, and he passes it by with contempt. He has unshipped the rudder of his judgment, and steers towards the rocks with awful deliberation, and seems as if he would wish to know where he can find the surest place to commit eternal shipwreck. His judgment is out of order.

Further, his actions are those of a madman. This prodigal son, first of all, had interests apart from his father. He must have been mad to have conceived such an idea as that. For me to have interests apart from him who made me, and keeps me alive,—for me, the creature of an hour, to fancy that I can have a will in opposition to the will of God, and that I can so live and prosper,—why, I must be a fool! I must be mad to wish any such thing, for it is consistent with the highest reason to believe that he who yields himself up to omnipotent goodness must be in the track of happiness, but that he who sets himself against the almighty grace of God must certainly be kicking against the pricks to his own wounding and hurt. Yet this sinner does not see that it is so, and the reason is that he is beside himself.

Then, next, that young man went away from his home, though it was the best home in all the world. We can judge that from the exceeding tenderness and generosity of the father at the head of it, and from the wonderful way in which all the servants had such entire sympathy with their master. It was a happy home, well stored with all that the son could need; yet he quits it to go he knows not whither, among strangers who did not care a straw for him, and who, when they had drained his purse, would not give him even a penny with which to buy bread to save him from starving. The prodigal must have been mad to act like that; and for any of us to leave him who has been the dwelling-place of his saints in all generations, to quit the warmth and comfort of the Church of God which is the home of joy and peace, is clear insanity. Anyone who does this is acting against his own best interests, he is choosing the path of shame and sorrow, he is casting away all true delight; he must be mad.

You can see that this young man is out of his mind, because, when he gets into the far country, he begins spending his money riotously. He does not lay it out judiciously, he spends his money for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not; and that is just what the sinner does. If he be self-righteous, he is trying to weave a robe out of the worthless material of his own works; and if he be a voluptuary, given up to sinful indulgence, what vanity it is for him to hope for pleasure in the midst of sin! Should I expect to meet with angels in the sewers, with heavenly light in a dark mine? Nay, these are not places for such things as those; and can I rationally look for joy to my heart from revelling, chambering, wantonness, and such conduct? If I do, I must be mad. Oh, if men were but rational, and they often wrongly suppose that they are,—if they were but rational beings, they would see how irrational it is to sin! The most reasonable thing in the world is to spend life for its own true design, and not to fling it away as though it were a pebble on the sea-shore.

Further, the prodigal was a fool, he was mad, for he spent all. He did not even stop half way on the road to penury, but he went on till he had spent all. There is no limit to those who have started in a course of sin. He that stays back from it, by God's grace may keep from it; but it is with sin as it is with the intoxicating cup. One said to me, the other day, "I can drink much, or I can drink none; but I have not the power to drink a little, for if I begin I cannot stop myself, and may go to any length." So is it with sin, God's grace can keep you abstaining from sin; but, if you begin sinning, oh, how one sin draws on another! One sin is the decoy or magnet for another sin, and draws it on; and one cannot tell, when he begins to descend this slippery slide, how quickly and how far he may go. Thus the prodigal spent all in utter recklessness; and, oh, the recklessness of some young sinners whom I know! And, oh, the greater recklessness of some old sinners who seem resolved to be damned, for, having but a little remnant of life left, they waste that last fragment of it in fatal delay!

Then it was, dear friends, when the prodigal had spent all, that he still further proved his madness. That would have been the time to go home to his father; but, apparently, that thought did not occur to him. "He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country," still overpowered by the fascination that kept him away from the one place where he might have been happy; and, that is one of the worst proofs of the madness of some of you who frequent these courts, that, though you know about the great God and his infinite mercy, and know somewhat of how much you need him and his grace, yet you still try to get what you want somewhere else, and do not go back to him.

I shall not have time to say much more upon this point, but I must remind you that, like sinners, the prodigal had the ways of a madman. I have had, at times, to deal with those whose reason has failed them, and I have noticed that many of them have been perfectly sane, and even wise and clever, on all points except one. So is it with the sinner. He is a famous politician; just hear him talk. He is a wonderful man of business; see how sharply he looks after every penny. He is very judicious in everything but this, he is mad on one point, he has a fatal monomania, for it concerns his own soul.

A madman will often conceal his madness from those round about him; so will a sinner hide his sin. You may talk with this man about morals, and you may watch him very closely; yet you may be a long time before you can find him out, and be able to say to him, "One thing thou lackest." Perhaps, on a sudden, you touch that weak point, and there he stands fully developed before you, far gone in his insanity. He is right enough elsewhere, but with regard to his soul his reason is gone.

Mad people do not know that they have been mad till they are cured; they think that they alone are wise, and all the rest are fools. Here is another point of their resemblance to sinners, for they also think that everybody is wrong except themselves. Hear how they will abuse a pious wife as "a fool." What hard words they will use towards a gracious daughter! How they will rail at the ministers of the gospel, and try to tear God's Bible to pieces! Poor mad souls, they think all are mad except themselves! We, with tears, pray God to deliver them from their delusions, and to bring them to sit at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in their right minds.

Sometimes, the sinner will be seen and known to be mad because he turns on his best friends, as madmen do. Those whom they otherwise would have loved the most they reckon to be their worst enemies. So God, who is man's best Friend, is most despised, and Christ, who is the Friend of sinners, is rejected, and the most earnest Christians are often the most avoided or persecuted by sinners.

Mad people sometimes, too, will rave, and then you know what dreadful things they will say. So is it with sinners when their fits are on them. I dare not speak of what they will do and what they will say. They often pull themselves up, afterwards, and feel ashamed to think that they should have gone so far; yet so it is, for they are beside themselves, even as the prodigal was.

I will not dwell longer on this sad fact, because I want to speak on the next and brighter part of my theme.

II. Secondly, IT IS A BLESSED THING WHEN THE SINNER COMES TO HIMSELF: "When he came to himself." This is the first mark of grace working in the sinner as it was the first sign of hope for the prodigal.

Sometimes, this change occurs suddenly. I was greatly charmed, this week, by meeting with one to whom this happened. It was an old-fashioned sort of conversion, with which I was delighted. There came into this building, some three months ago, a man who had not for a long time gone to any place of worship. He despised such things; he could swear, and drink, and do worse things still, he was careless, godless; but he had a mother who often prayed for him, and he had a brother who is, I believe, here to-night, whose prayer has never ceased for him. He did not come here to worship, he came just to see the preacher whom his brother had been hearing for so many years; but, coming in, somehow he was no sooner in the place than he felt that he was unfit to be here, so he went up into the top gallery, as far back as he could, and when some friend beckoned him to take a seat, he felt that he could not do so, he must just lean against the wall at the back. Someone else invited him to sit down, but he could not; he felt that he had no right to do so; but when the preacher announced his text, (See Metropolitan Tabernacle

Pulpit, No. 1,949, "A Sermon for the Worst Man on Earth.") "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner;"—and said something like this, "You that stand farthest off in the Tabernacle, and dare not sit down because you feel your guilt to be so great, you are the man to whom God has sent me this morning, and he bids you come to Christ and find mercy," a miracle of love was wrought. Then, "he came to himself," as he will tell us soon at the church-meeting, when he comes forward to confess his faith. I rejoiced greatly when I heard of it, for in his case there is a change that everybody who knows him can see. He has become full of a desire after everything that is gracious as once he practised everything that was bad. Now that is what sometimes happens, and why should it not happen again tonight? Why should not some other man, or some woman, come to himself or to herself tonight? This is the way home, first to come to yourself, and then to come to your God. "He came to himself."

On the other hand, sometimes this change is very gradual. I need not dwell upon that, but there are many who have their eyes opened by degrees. They first see men as trees walking; afterwards, they see all things clearly. So long as they do but come to themselves, and come to the Saviour, I mind not how they come. Some conversions are sudden, some gradual; but in every case, if it be the work of the Holy Spirit, and the man comes to himself, it is well.

Now let us consider how this change happened. If you should ask me the outward circumstances of the prodigal's case, I should say that it took a great deal to bring him to himself. "Why, surely!" one says, "he ought to have come to himself when he had spent all, he must have come to himself when he began to be hungry." No; it took a great deal to bring him to himself, and to his father; and it takes a great deal to bring sinners to themselves, and to their God. There are some of you who will have to be beaten with many stripes before you will be saved. I heard one say, who was crushed almost to death in an accident, "If I had not nearly perished, I should have wholly perished." So is it with many sinners; if some had not lost all they had, they would have lost all; but, by strong winds, rough and raging, some are driven into the port of peace.

The occasion of the prodigal's climax was this; he was very hungry, and in great sorrow, and he was alone. It is a grand thing if we can get people to be alone. There was nobody near the poor man, and no sound for him to hear except the grunting of the hogs, and the munching of those husks. Ah, to be alone! I wish that we had more opportunities of being alone in this great city; yet, perhaps the most awful loneliness may be realized while walking a London street. It is a good thing for a sinner sometimes to be alone. The prodigal had nobody to drink with him, nobody to sport with him; he was too far gone for that. He had not a rag to pawn to get another pint, he must therefore just sit still without one of his old companions. They only followed him for what they could get out of him. As long as he could treat them, they would treat him well; but when he had spent all, "no man gave unto him." He was left without a comrade, in misery he could not allay, in hunger he could not satisfy. He pulled that belt up another hole, and made it tighter; but it almost seemed as if he would pull himself in two if he drew it any

closer. He was reduced almost to a skeleton; emaciation had taken hold of him, and he was ready to lie down there and die. Then it was that he came to himself.

Do you know why this change occurred in the prodigal's case? I believe that the real reason was that his father was secretly working for him all the while. His state was known to his father; I am sure it was, because the elder brother knew it; and if the elder brother heard of it, so did the father. The elder brother may have told him or, if not, the father's greater love would have a readier ear for tidings of his son than the elder brother had. Though the parable cannot tell us,—for no parable is meant to teach us everything,—yet it was true that the Father was omnipotent, and he was secretly touching the core of this young man's heart, and dealing with him by this wondrous surgery of famine and of want to make him at last come to himself.

Perhaps somebody here says, "I wish I could come to myself, sir, without going through all that process." Well, you have come to yourself already if you really wish that. Let me suggest to you that, in order to prove that it is so, you should begin seriously to think, to think about who you are, and where you are, and what is to become of you. Take time to think, and think in an orderly, steady, serious manner; and, if you can, jot down your thoughts. It is a wonderful help to some people to put down upon paper an account of their own condition. I believe that there were many who found the Saviour one night when I urged them, when they went home, to write on a piece of paper, "Saved as a believer in Jesus," or else, "Condemned because I believe not on the Son of God." Some who began to write that word "condemned" have never finished it, for they found Christ there and then while seeking him. You keep your account books, do you not? I am sure you do if you are in trade, unless you are going to cheat your creditors. You keep your business books; well, now, keep a record concerning your soul. Really look these matters in the face, the hereafter, death which may come so suddenly, the great eternity, the judgment-seat. Do think about these things; do not shut your eyes to them. Men and women, I pray you, do not play the fool! If you must play the fool, take some lighter things to trifle with than your souls, and your eternal destinies. Shut yourselves up alone, for a while; go through this matter steadily, lay it out in order, make a plan of it. See where you are going. Think over the way of salvation, the story of the cross, the love of God, the readiness of Christ to save; and I think that, while this process is going on, you will feel your heart melting, and soon you will find your soul believing in the precious blood which sets the sinner free.

III. I had much more to say, but time has gone; so I must close with just a few words on this last point, **WHEN HE CAME TO HIMSELF, THEN HE CAME TO HIS FATHER.**

When a sinner comes to himself, he soon comes to his God. This poor prodigal, soon after he came to himself, said, "I will arise, and go to my father." What led him back to his father? Very briefly let me answer that question.

First, his memory aroused him. He recollected his father's house, he remembered the past, his own riotous living. Do not try to forget all that has

happened; the terrible recollections of a misspent past may be the means of leading you to a new life. Set memory to work.

Next, his misery bestirred him. Every pang of hunger that he felt, the sight of his rags, the degradation of associating with swine,—all those things drove him back to his father. O sirs, let your very needs, your cravings, your misery, drive you to your God!

Then, his fears whipped him back. He said, “I perish with hunger.” He had not perished yet, but he was afraid that he soon would do so; he feared that he really would die, for he felt so faint. O sirs, see what will become of you if you do die in your sins! What awaits you but an endless future of limitless misery? Sin will follow you into eternity, and will increase upon you there, and as you shall go on to sin, so shall you go on to sorrow ever-increasing. A deeper degradation and a more tremendous penalty will accompany your sin in the world to come; therefore, let your fears drive you home, as they drove home the poor prodigal.

Meanwhile, his hope drew him. This gentle cord was as powerful as the heavy whip: “In my father’s house there is bread enough and to spare; I need not perish with hunger, I may yet be filled.” Oh, think of what you may yet be! Poor sinner, think of what God can do and is ready to do for you, to do for you even tonight! How happy he can make you! How peaceful and how blessed! So let your hope draw you to him.

Then, his resolve moved him. He said, “I will arise, and go to my father.” All else drove him or drew him, and now he is resolved to return home. He rose up from the earth on which he had been sitting amidst his filthiness, and he said, “I will.” Then the man became a man; he had come to himself, the manhood had come back to him, and he said, “I will, I will.”

Lastly, there was the real act of going to his father; it was that which brought him home. Nay, let me correct myself; it is said, “He came to his father,” but there is a higher truth at the back of that, for his father came to him. So, when you are moved to return, and the resolution becomes an action, and you arise, and go to God., salvation is yours almost before you could have expected it; for, once turn your face that way, and while you are yet a great way off, your Father will outstrip the wind, and come and meet you, and fall upon your neck, and kiss you with the kisses of reconciliation. This shall be your portion if you will but trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

As for you, Christian people, who may be saying that there is nothing for you in the sermon, do not turn into a company of grumbling elder brothers; but, on the contrary, go home, and pray God to bless this discourse. “But,” you say, “I have not had the fatted calf to-night.” “Oh, but if it was killed for the younger son, it was for you also!” “I did not have the music and dancing to-night.” Well, they have had it over the returned prodigal, over some soul that has already believed in Christ to-night; I know they have, God does not let us preach for nought. He will pay us our wages, and give us our reward; so rejoice with us over all that the Lord has done, and all that he is going to do. The Lord bless you, beloved, all of you, without exception, for Christ’s sake! Amen.



# Exposition.

by

## Spurgeon.

### LUKE XV.

This is a chapter that needs no explanation; it carries its key within itself, and the experience of every child of God is the best exposition of it. The three parables recorded here set forth the work of saving grace in different aspects.

Verses 1, 2. Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

The Pharisees and scribes formed the outside ring of Christ's hearers, but the inner circle consisted of the guilty, the heavy-laden, and the lowly. They pressed as near to Christ as they could, that they might catch his every word; and besides, there was an attractiveness about his manner that drew them towards him. His mercy attracted their misery. They wanted him, and he desired them; they were thus well met. There will be an inner circle to-night when the gospel is preached, and it will not consist of the self-righteous. They that are full will not press to the table on which the gospel feast is spread, the hungry will be found nearest to the heavenly provision.

3. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, There are three parables here; but, inasmuch as it is called "this parable", it is really only one. It is a picture in three panels, representing the same scene from different points of view.

4. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

It has a new importance in his eyes, for it is lost. Before, it was only one of a hundred in the fold; but now it is one distinct and separate from all the rest, and the shepherd's thought is fixed upon it.

5, 6. And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

No doubt he was glad that the other sheep were not lost; but that joy was, for a while, quite eclipsed in the more striking and vivid joy over the one which had been lost.

7. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

If such there be,—and there are many who think that they belong to this class, they bring no joy to the great Shepherd; but you who have had to mourn over your lost estate set- the bells of heaven ringing with a new melody when you are recovered by the great Redeemer.

The first of these three parables may be said to represent salvation in reference to the work of the Son of God as the great Seeker and Saver of the souls of men. In the second, we have a representation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church of God.

8. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

Her thoughts were all concerning that one lost piece. It had not more intrinsic value than the rest, but being lost it called off her attention from the other nine. She valued it, and for the hope of finding it she lighted a candle, swept the house, and sought diligently till she found it. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit's work in seeking for lost souls. They bear the King's impress, they are coins of the realm. This woman knew that the silver coin was not far away, so she swept the house, and sought diligently, using all her eyes, devoting all her time to this one object, quitting all other avocations until she found it.

9. And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

She might never have called them together to rejoice that she had ten pieces of silver, she might even have hidden them away; and the joy she had in them might have been only her own, a

solitary joy; but now that one piece had been lost, and had been found again, she says, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."

10. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Not joy among the angels, as some read it, though no doubt that is a truth; but "joy in the presence of the angels of God; "and what can that mean but that God himself rejoices, and rejoices so that angels perceive it; and no doubt they then join in the delight? But all this points out that it is the lost one that is the great object of consideration, that out of any congregation where the gospel is preached, it is the lost one who is the most important person in the whole place.

In the next verses, we get the Father's part in the work of the recovery of the wanderer.

11-13. And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

His heart was far away when he asked his father to give him his portion; and now his body is far away as he goes into the outward wandering which follows after the inner wandering.

14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land.

There generally does arise "a mighty famine" in such cases. Famines and other miseries are God's messengers which he sends after his wandering children.

14. And he began to be in want.

This was a new sensation to him; he had never known it when he was at home. He did not know it in his first boisterous days away from his father's house, but now "he began to be in want."

15. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

Perhaps he did not want to employ him, but said that he would give him that occupation if he cared to accept it. It was small pay, very dishonouring work to a Jew, not fit employment for the son of a nobleman; yet "half a loaf is better than no bread," so he took it, though even the half loaf must have been a very small one.

16. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

Such a thing as generosity was not known in that country. His companions could share his riches when he was living riotously, but they will not share their riches now that he is in his poverty.

17. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

"My father's day-labourers have bread enough and to spare, yet I, his child, perish with hunger."

18, 19. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

You notice that this last part of the prayer he never did pray; for it was stopped by his father's love. There was a legalism about it naturally suggested by his own despair, but it was not such as his father would tolerate.

20, 21. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

There comes an interruption there; the kiss upon his lips stops the rest of the prayer which he had prepared, and now the father declares his will concerning the wanderer.

22-24. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

I have never read that they left off being merry, for the conversion of a soul is enough to make eternal joy in the hearts of the righteous.

25, 26. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

This was a new thing, and apparently a thing that he did not care much about, How had it come to pass that there was such noise, such joy?

27, 28. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.

I hardly know which to admire most, the love of the father when he fell upon the neck of the prodigal, or the love of the father when he went out to talk with his elder son: "Therefore came his father out, and entreated him." Oh, our God is very good to us when we give way to naughty tempers! If we begin to think that we are very holy people, that we have been long the servants of God, and that there ought to be some little fuss made over us as well as over great sinners that come into the church, then our Father is very gentle, and he comes out and entertains us.

29. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends;

"I have had no banquets. I have kept at home, a patient worker, and have had no extraordinary joys." I know some Christian workers who are very much in this condition. They keep on and on and on in holy service, and they do well; but they seldom have great entertainments of high joy and unspeakable delight. It is their own fault, and it is a thousand pities that they do not have them, for they might have them if they would. There is a tendency to grow so absorbed in service, like Martha, that we are cumbered by it; and we do not have the joy of Mary in communion at the Master's feet. I am sure that this elder son was out of fellowship with his father, or else he would not have talked as he did. We are all apt to get into such a condition. See to it, ye who work for Jesus, that it is not so with you.

Then the elder brother went on to say,—

30. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

I do not read that the prodigal had devoured his father's living with harlots; that is the elder brother's version of it. I dare say that it was true, but it is always a pity to give the roughest interpretation to things. He had spent his substance "in riotous living." When we are cross, we generally use the ugliest words we can; we may think that we are speaking forcibly, but indeed we are speaking naughtily, and not as our Father would have us speak.

31. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

Oh, what a word was that! How it reminds Christians of their privileges, if they would but appropriate them! It is yours, beloved, to live always with your God, and to know that all that he has is yours. You ought to live in a perpetual festival; for you there should be one joyful Christmas-tide that lasts from the beginning of the year to the end of it: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

32. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

It was the fit thing, and the proper thing, and the right thing, that there should be extraordinary joy over a returning sinner. There ought to be, there must be, there shall be, special music and dancing over sinners saved by the grace of God. The Lord give us some such to-night, and make us glad over them! Amen.

John Ploughman's Talk; or, Plain Advice for Plain People.

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