

"I Will Go to My Father"

"This thy brother was dead, and is alive again! He was lost, and is found!"—Luke 15:32

IN this parable there were three characters—a father and two sons. One son, the younger, asked for his portion which was to come to him after his father's death.

He obtained the portion, wasted it in riotous living, and having spent all he had, came to poverty and realized that the servants in his father's house had more than he now had.

The son decided to go home, acknowledge his mistake and ask for a job as a hired servant.

The father, who loved his son so much that, while he knew how foolish his son had been, how he had misused his money, and led a fast life, nevertheless welcomed him home, had compassion on him and made a feast, thus showing in every way that he was happy to have his son home again and to forget all the wrong done to him.

The elder brother, who unlike the younger, had stayed home, cared for his father's property, obeyed his father, was in most every way an exemplary son; yet he manifested some quite unlovely traits. He was not at all of the loving, kind, forgiving, understanding nature the father was.

This parable is one of the great masterpieces of literature. Its appeal lies in the fact that it is true to life; a true portrayal of the waywardness, the selfishness, of men and women; and of the parent's love for the sinning child.

Using this as a base for the lesson of God's love, we are given a picture of our Father in heaven which surely cannot fail to touch the feelings of the most hardened sinner.

The father had by much labor and thoughtfulness gathered an estate to enjoy while he lived, and after his death all would go to his sons. The sons, who lived at home, were well fed, cared for, had every comfort and a secure future.

Were they satisfied? They **should** have been, but the younger was not. Far away fields always look green, and he wanted to enjoy what is now called some of the "experiences" of life.

So, the younger son, restless under his father's roof, instruction and perhaps correction, wanted to go out for himself, to do what HE wanted to do and "live his own life." (How familiar and up-to-date it all seems!)

So he went, taking with him his future fortune which he wasted, which was to have been his to live on and enjoy later.

Paul says (Gal. 5:19, Diag.)—

"The works of the flesh are manifestly these; fornication, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, quarrels, jealousies, resentments, altercations, factions, sects, envyings, inebrities, revellings, and such things,

"Respecting which I tell you before, even as I previously told you, that those who practise such things shall not inherit God's Kingdom."

How true all this is to the SPIRITUAL import of the parable! There's peace and security in the Father's house if we will be content to dwell there. In Ps. 91 we find that—

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of The Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

There is a security in the Father's house that can be found no where else on earth. Ps. 46 tells us that—

"God is our refuge and strength, therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed.

"The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge!"

But how perverse is the human heart! We are told by the Father of the blessings of abiding with Him; we are told by those who have lived long lives of the emptiness of worldly things.

Nevertheless, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" at times pull us away from the influence of the Father, and the "pleasures of sin for a season" cause us to turn our back on God, as did the younger son to his father.

Later, when he had returned, his father said of him that he had been (v. 32)—

"Dead, and was alive again."

And truly he had been "dead." Separation from the Father, the vain pursuit of elusive and heart-cheating "pleasure" IS death, as many Scriptures show—

"She (or he) that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6).

"To be carnally-minded is death" (Rom. 8:6).

"Dead in trespasses and sins . . . according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:1-2).

"A name that thou livest, but art dead" (Rev. 3:1).

ALL death is sad, but THIS death, for those who have had opportunity to be alive, is tragic. Truly his son was returned from the dead!

He had to leave the father's house to find riotous living, and so we must leave God if we want that sort of life.

The higher, better influences and the nobler traits of character are those of the dwellers in God's house.

Riotous, profligate living is to be found if we want it, but not in God's house. We can have such a life if we want it; the choice is ours; no one demands that we stay in the Father's house, but let us not forget the terrible results if we do go out.

Surely it hath been said that the eye hath not seen nor the ear heard the blessings which God hath prepared, for those who love Him, but these are not for those who leave God and go out from under the influence of their Father.

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RETURNING to the parable we find that the wasteful, self-willed, prodigal son went out, as we at times go out. All sense and reason tells us that we should not go out of the Father's house, but at times we do. As Paul says in his searching spiritual analysis of the motions of the flesh (Rom. 7:19)—

"The good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."
Why? Because (Rom. 8:7)—

"The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God."

—and when we allow its desires to control us, we go out, waste our heritage, leave our security, our guide and instructor. We jeopardize our whole eternal future to enjoy the brief "pleasures" of sin for a season.

And what do we get for it? Husks!—like the son in the parable; empty shells; lifeless, unnourishing, unsatisfying refuse. We perish with hunger on such a diet as we receive when we turn from God.

All history, all experience—as well as God Himself— tells us it is not worthwhile—

"Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it."

Temperance is one of the things a saint adds to his virtues. Riotous living is for fools.

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RETURNING to the parable, we find (v. 17)—

"When he came to himself."

Fortunately he DID come to himself. He was not "himself" when he was sinfully wasting his life and substance. We are not "ourselves," not acting according to our knowledge when we forget God, put Him behind our back—when we do things contrary to God's will in order to satisfy fleshly desires (Gal. 4:9)—

"Now, after ye have KNOWN GOD, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements?"

"When he came to himself." There were better things in his father's house than the "swine" he was among. Even the most humble in his father's house were better off than he. And there are better things for us in the Truth than in the world, even now —

"Godliness hath promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come."

And there are promises of infinitely better things, for—

"At His right hand are pleasures evermore."

So the son wisely decided to go back to his father. How would he go back? In what state of mind? This is very important to the parable's lesson.

Would he be swaggering? Bold? Would he have a "Now I know the world, I guess I will settle down" attitude? The whole point of the parable is found right here—

"I will arise and go to my father, and 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 servants."

It is equally important to understand what kind of a father this son had, and what kind of a Father we have.

Was his father harsh? Resentful? Accusing? Condemning? Vindictive? On the merits of the case, the father could justly have refused to have anything more to do with one who had sinned against him as had this son. And on the merits of our deeds we—the sons and daughters of the Living God—have no standing before Him. Is it not written—

"If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand!"

"Father, I have sinned. I am no more worthy to be called thy son, but I want to have some humble place with you—a servant, anything! I have made a terrible mistake: I know it. I am sorry I have done this to you. Forgive me!"

We can read all these thoughts in this incident. The whole thought summed up is that the son **humbled himself**. And how gratifying, how comforting, to know that no one in this state of mind is ever turned down by the Father, if He is approached in truth (Isa. 55:7)—

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts:
"And let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him.
"And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Did the father, when he knew his son was returning, treat him as he deserved? Or even as he asked to be treated—as a servant? Did he scold him? Did he remind him of how wrong he had acted? Did he say, "I told you so"?

Remember, this part of the parable is intended to teach us about God: to show us what kind of a Father we have, and his merciful attitude toward us when we humble ourselves as did this prodigal son.

So when we think of this part of the parable, we should think of it as describing God's state of mind toward us when we, as sinners, turn back to God, to His house; to His keeping; to the safety, the comfort, the security of abiding in Him.

What did the father in the parable do? He did not even wait for the son to get to the house (vs. 20-24)—

"But when he was yet a great way off, the father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him . . .

"And 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!"

There was not simply toleration of having an erring son in the house again, nor was there the idea of making the best of a bad situation. This is not the picture. God can be, as another parable shows Him, a hard austere man. There have been and still are situations in which He hardens His face.

But never to the humble, repentant sinner; never to a son who shows the disposition of this prodigal.

We get the thought here of a joyous welcome, a happy reunion; of pity by the father, of compassion, of full and complete forgiveness for all and everything. The father is even more happy to have his erring son back again than the son to be back. All is forgotten, forgiven, because the heart of the father is so full of joy at his son's return and nothing else matters.

Read the parable in the preceding verses of this same chapter. A man had 100 sheep, of which one became lost. Did not the man leave the 99 and go after that which was lost until he found it? And when he had found it, did he not carry it on his shoulders, rejoicing? On his arrival home he called in his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him for, said he—

"I have found my sheep which was lost."

And in v. 10—

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

"Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over 90 and 9 just persons which need no repentance."

This is the teaching of all Scripture on this subject, as further illustrated in Ps. 145:8—

"The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion: slow to anger, and of great mercy."

And James 5:11—

"The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

Again in Neh. 9:17—

"But Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness."

And finally, Mic 7:18—

"Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?

"He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy."

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BUT what of the elder brother in the parable? He was angry, and would not go in to the feast. The reason is seen in vs. 29-30. There is a lesson here too. Up till now the elder brother was the better man of the two.

While the younger had left the father to spend his substance in riotous living, the elder had stayed home to help. He had served many years, performed faithfully and never sinned against the Father.

But even with all these virtues he was not spiritually-minded. He was jealous, proud, self-righteous, sulky and angry. "He would not go in."

He was, of course, wrong—he should have gone in. His brother was lost and had been found. It was meet that he, like the father, should make merry and be glad.

His brother had done wrong; true; but he had repented of that wrong. The father, against whom the sin had been committed, had forgiven. Surely then the elder brother should have gone in and rejoiced.

The lesson here perhaps is this very important one—that a repentant sinner is in better standing with God than a self-righteous saint.

In closing, there is a final thought (John 3-16)—

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."
—who was (Heb. 4:15-16)—

"In all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin . . .

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

—W.M.B.

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