

The Prodigal

by Catherine Booth

The parable of the prodigal son teaches us about the misery and wretchedness of man while alienated and wandering from God, and the welcome and blessedness there is in store for him on returning to his Father's house.

Scripture: Psalm 32:5, Isaiah 55:7, Luke 15:10, Luke 15:13, James 4:8

Topics: "Repentance And Forgiveness", "Gods Unconditional Love"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the parable of the prodigal son, illustrating the rebellious nature of humanity and the unconditional love and forgiveness of God. She emphasizes the consequences of straying from God, the wastefulness of living without Him, and the ultimate joy of repentance and reconciliation with the Father. Through the prodigal son's journey back home, she highlights the importance of reflection, resolution, and action in returning to God, showcasing the Father's eagerness to forgive and restore His lost children.

Transcript

LUKE XV. 13.-' 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.'

THIS parable we may regard as a world-picture painted by Jesus Christ to show a world of rebels their heavenly Father's love for them. It is so beautiful that one is afraid to touch it lest one should spoil it. It is like adding another shade to some masterpiece of art: one fears to mar the whole. Yet there are points of instruction, and lessons which may lead to the most blessed results; and lessons that we cannot learn so well anywhere else.

Doubtless this parable had reference to the Jewish and Gentile worlds. By the returning of the younger son is prefigured the restoration of the Gentile nations; while the proud self-righteousness and rejection of the younger brother by the elder, refers to the Pharisaism of the Jews. But the primary and most important lesson is doubtless the misery and wretchedness of man while alienated and wandering from God, and the welcome and blessedness there is in store for him on returning to his Father's house. This parable does not refer to any particular class of men, but belongs to our race. It shows the desperate condition of man, and the wonderful love and benevolence of God.

I want to point out the analogy between the condition of this prodigal and that of unregenerate men universally.

The first point I want you to note is, that this young man demanded his portion. Taking advantage of the law of his country, which allowed him to do this, irrespective of his father's purposes or convenience, he simply isolated himself from the family interests, and sets up on his own account, that he might use his substance for his own gratification, without reference to his future welfare or the control of his father.

Just so sinners choose their portion in this life. They know that God requires them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, denying worldly lusts, and to lay up treasure in Heaven. But they prefer their treasure here, they want their heaven now; present gratification is what they are intent upon, and this they pursue without respect to the will or purpose of God. Further, this young man not only demanded his portion, but made off with it--he wanted to use it as he liked; he was tired of the discipline and restraints of home, he could not work out his wicked purposes there; so he gathered together his goods, and went as far away as he could, where he could live as he liked, unrestrained by his father's authority or grief. So sinners wilfully depart from God; for although all men are born in sin, and cannot be said to belong to God's spiritual family, there is a time in the history of every sinner (certainly of every one who hears the Gospel) when he chooses to remain away from God, and the choice to remain away is equivalent to positive departure. Thus sinners chose to keep away from God, and to live without the restraint of His law.

Perhaps you ask, But how do they do this? Of course they cannot literally get away from God, for He spies out all their ways and compasses their path. But they get away from Him spiritually by forgetting Him. They reject His ministry, His Bible, His Spirit, shutting up their spiritual eyes and closing their spiritual ears. The remembrance of God frightens them in their sins, it terrifies them in their rebellion. Therefore their whole effort is to forget Him; they say, `We will not have Thee to reign over us `we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.'

In this respect all men are alike concluded under sin. They differ largely in the manner of disposing of themselves while absent from God; but they are all away in a far country without His consent, contrary to His wish, and in defiance of His authority. They may possess many good qualities and amiable traits; they may be very generous and good-natured to their fellow-prodigals; but in setting at naught their Father's will and law, they are prodigals still, notwithstanding. Imagine a family of sons conspiring together to get their father's fortune. They find a place where they may live comfortably, and have a merry time together, independent of their father. But before they start they say, `Well, though we have done with the old man, yet we won't fight and put out each other's eyes; we will draw up a moral code for ourselves, and live respectfully and decently. We will not waste our substance in riotous living, but we will make the best of our talents, opportunities, and means; nobody shall have any just cause of complaint about us!' Very good. But what ABOUT THE FATHER? Has HE no claims? Is it nothing to trample under foot his laws, frustrate his purpose, grieve his heart, and bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? Can their generosity or morality one towards another atone for their flagrant want of fidelity, love, and obedience to their father? Just so, sinner, you may live ever so morally, and dispose of your substance ever so respectably, and yet be a prodigal, just as much as though you spent your substance in riotous living. Your Father has the FIRST CLAIM; and until you return to Him in repentance and submission, you are a rebel.

Further, this young man spent all. He wasted his substance in riotous living, the substance given him by his father--his time, talents, and education, as well as his wealth--all were wasted, thrown away on mere self and animal gratification; bringing no profit, but injury both to himself and others. Thus sinners waste

their substance. All the blessings they possess come from God; He gives them life, health, talents, influence, substance, to be used in His service; but they WASTE THEM.

Perhaps some one says, 'I will have you know I do not waste mine; I am very economical, and work very hard for my family. I should like you to see my houses, and I am building more'; or, 'I have a good sum in the bank; I am not a spendthrift, nor an extravagant man.' My friend, the very fact that you are away from God blights it all, and therefore every farthing is wasted. There is no eternal profit. You have nothing to carry into eternity. Christian, have you ever stood by the death-bed of a prodigal, in anguish bewailing a life squandered? In vain those around assure him, 'But you have not lived in vain; you have brought up a family, look at your toil for them, and the lands you leave them, and the reputation you have acquired.' 'Oh,' he says, 'there is a CURSE ON IT ALL; it will not endure the judgment bar. I have gathered much, but it is all in the far country; it will all be lost, burnt up, sunk.' Man only begins to live when he returns to God. We Christians never reckon our lives anything before our conversion; we look upon them as thrown away. And so it is with every sinner.

Supposing a man had decided in ten years to go to Australia, and that by an Act of Parliament he would have to sacrifice and leave behind him all that he possessed when he set foot upon the ship; what would you think of him, knowing this, and yet slaving so that he had no time to be with his family; toiling early and late, not giving himself time so much as to eat? And when you ask him, 'Why do you work so hard?' he answers, 'Oh, I am saving; I am gathering my substance; I am getting all I can.' You would say, 'My dear fellow, do you not know that you must forfeit every tittle of it, you must leave it all behind when you set sail for Australia?' And suppose he were to reply, 'Yes, I know that; but still I must spend the intervening years in gathering, nevertheless!' You would say, 'The man is insane; he is only fit for an asylum.'

SINNER, BEHOLD YOURSELF; you are slaving for learning, fame, wealth, power, or what else you have set your heart upon. But do you not know that you will have to leave all these at the edge of the river, and that, naked and empty, with nothing left but YOUR CHARACTER, you will have to step into the eternal world? Nothing will stand you in any stead there but that which has reference to God and His purposes concerning you. Oh, you know not but that today the sentence may go forth: 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; THEN WHOSE SHALL THESE THINGS BE?'

Further, I want to glance at the consequences of this young man's sin. His conduct was calculated to throw great discredit on his father's character and government; suspicions unkind, austere, and affection and obedience by his rebellion against God is not worthy of master; His commands would be excited that he was exacting--unworthy of the of his son. So every sinner, God, says to his fellow-men: being served; He is a hard and grievous, and His yoke burdensome.' He may not say this in words; but we all know how much louder actions speak than words.

This young man's conduct was also injurious to his family. By taking his portion prematurely, and wasting and prostituting it, he prevented the increase which would have resulted from his father's wise and judicious management of it; and thus injured the whole family. So every sinner takes the portion which God has given him, and instead of improving it for the general good, wastes it on self, or desecrates it to the injury of others. 'One sinner destroyeth much good'; and this good is not his own, it is his Father's. Oh, how many souls are ruined, especially amongst the young, through the evil example of some one older, more intelligent or wealthy than themselves! Sinner, you cannot avoid these consequences of a sinful life--your conduct is a daily curse to those around you, your spirit is a moral miasma wherever you go.

But, as in all such cases, the most disastrous consequence of this young man's sin fell upon himself. We read that he came to be in want--the natural and inevitable consequences of having spent all. The spending time was soon over; it yielded little pleasure, and that transitory. It was doubtless a goodly possession that youth took away from his father's house, but it was soon gone. And no sooner was it gone than `there arose a famine in that land.' As the old adage says, `Troubles never come alone,' and something generally happens when the substance is gone. How terrible this young man's circumstances! Alone, in a strange land, forsaken by his merry companions, of whom doubtless he had plenty while the substance lasted; but when the money goes, away go such companions, like rats from a sinking ship. Then the poor prodigal has to turn to the despised Salvationist for help and comfort. There is many a poor forlorn wretch tonight dying in an attic or cellar, without a single friend or companion near him, except it be perchance some missionary, on whom he would formerly have looked down with contempt.

A man's all is soon spent: his life, privileges, talents, opportunities, soon lost, and lost for ever. And then how long, and bitter, and dreadful the WANT which ensues! We read that to this young man's want no man ministered, `no man gave unto him.' Alas! No creatures can, if they would, minister to the sinner's spiritual destitution. In vain must he cry to the world, the flesh, or the Devil to satisfy the wants of his HUNGRY SOUL. They one and all reply, `It is not in me.' There is nothing in the pleasures of sense or the antidotes of Satan that will meet the wants of famishing souls.

How strange that, in the midst of all this poverty and destitution, this youth did not at once remember his father's house! Perhaps he did, but was yet too proud to return; so `he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country,' hoping by this expedient to be able to sustain life, and avoid the humiliation of going back to his father. So there are times in the history of all men wandering from God when they wake up to feel that they are in want. They want peace, purity, happiness, hope for death and eternity. They feel that they possess nothing which they dare take with them into the presence of their Judge; and yet, like this young man, they will try any expedient rather than return to their Father's house. They will take any service of the Devil, and submit to any humiliating drudgery, even worse than feeding of swine, rather than give in. Happy is it for the sinner when a sense of his poverty and misery leads him to consideration and repentance, as it did in the case of this youth. His situation proved utterly inadequate to meet his wants; and when driven to the last extremity of misery, not only having to feed swine, but being glad to feed with them, we read that `he came to himself.' Madness is said to be in the heart of sinners; `a deceived heart leadeth them astray.' And so inveterate is this madness that, with those who are brought to repentance, it frequently happens that nothing short of the most heartrending afflictions will bring them to their right minds; sickness, bereavement, loss, poverty, are amongst the means God uses for this end. But with many, so deep and inveterate is their insanity that even these means fail, and they go down to death with deceit on their tongues, and a lie in their right hand. Oh, how many in the Day of Judgment, who now consider themselves very sensible and judicious people, will look back upon their career on earth as one of unmitigated madness! What insanity will it then appear, to have bartered away pardon, purity, and everlasting bliss for the empty husks of carnal gratification.

A gentleman said to me at the railway station the other day, `You were right in what you said last night.' I asked in what respect. He answered, `In saying that the Lord has to inflict the heaviest chastisement in order to bring sinners to Himself. `I know it,' he said; `it has been so in my case.' I asked, `Has it answered the purpose?' `No,' said he, shaking his head. `Then,' I said, `look out; you are not bad enough yet. God will strip you of every blessing and every comfort you possess, rather than let you go to Hell in this state.' `Oh,' said he, `I have not much left; the Lord took away from me three years ago a loving, precious wife,

the idol of my soul; then a little while ago I lost £30,000, and I have had other troubles since. In fact, He has been knocking me about in my circumstances for years.' I said, 'Yes, because He loves you too well to let you go to Hell without trying to save you. And if you will not let Him do it without stripping you naked as the prodigal, you must expect this chastisement, till, like him, you are willing to leave the far country and return to your Father.'

But, I repeat, happy the sinner whose sorrows and sufferings lead to repentance! The first step in the right direction was REFLECTION; this young man began to think! At length he lost sight of everything but his own destitution and the plenty of his father's home; then he said to himself, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' What bitter reflections must have filled his mind! Can you not imagine that you see him sitting on a stone, amid the husks and filth of the swine-yard, ruminating on his past life, thinking of his folly and wickedness, and wondering whether, if he were to go back, his father would receive him? Happily these reflections led him to RESOLUTION.

How many take the first step; they think, and ponder, and promise, and intend, but they don't make up their minds. Not so this young man; he says, 'I will arise'; he asserts his manhood. He is conscious of moral freedom; he knows he can return if he likes. He does not sit down whining, 'I can't, I shall not be able to get there; I can't contend with the difficulties of the road.' If he had done that, he might have sat there until now, if he had lived as long, and been no nearer.

Alas! How many of God's prodigals go as far as this; they think, and ponder, and resolve, and re-resolve, but they never act. Your resolutions will not help you unless you put them into practice. This young man puts his resolution into ACTION. He starts on his journey! No doubt he had many a struggle with himself on the road, and many a struggle with the Devil; for there was a Devil then, you know, just as there is one now. Methinks, as he got half-way, hungry and weary, I see him leaning his back against a tree, and going through one of those mental conflicts. The possibility of his father being dead, or, if alive, unwilling to receive him, angrily and reproachfully shutting the door in his face, would rise before him. Satan would suggest, 'What impudence, for you to think of going home after having treated the old man as you have done, breaking his law, wasting his money, and bringing yourself into this disgraceful and dilapidated condition! How dare you think of it! it is adding insult to injury. You had better turn back, or try and get a situation somewhere up in this neighbourhood.' But the prodigal's eyes were opened, he believed that his father loved him still; he was looking towards his father's house, And his heart was melting with repentance and longing to be reinstated in his father's love. And so, plucking up his courage, he starts again, supporting himself as best he can on his weary route. As he comes within view of the old homestead, the familiar scenes of his childhood are too much for him, and he stands almost paralysed with grief!

We will leave him there for a minute, and go to seek his father. I don't suppose the father was looking out for him; but, as was customary in the East, he was, probably walking on the roof of his house in the cool of the day, and, as on many a former occasion, he thought of his long-lost son--for though he was a prodigal, he was his lad still! It might be that he had some strange presentiment or foreboding, as we sometimes have when anything uncommon is about to happen. How natural that he should gaze over the expanse of country across which his son had gone! and, as he looks, he sees a speck in the distance: a vague curiosity compels his gaze; he looks as if into vacancy, until the figure draws nearer, when something in the form or the gait strikes him, and he says to himself, 'Can this be my boy coming back?' Then he chides himself, and says, 'What a foolish old man I am! because I dreamed of him last night, or have felt this strange foreboding, should I expect him to come?' And he takes his eyes away and breathes another

prayer, added to hundreds offered before: 'O Lord, my God, grant that I may see my prodigal boy before I die.' He takes another round on the roof, and returns to the same spot, and as he looks again he perceives the figure has come nearer, and his eyes are glued as it were to that form: the eye of affection is quick of recognition. He says, 'Can it be--it is like him--it must be--God is going to answer my prayers. IT IS, IT IS MY LONG-LOST BOY!' He makes the best of his way down and then, as fast as his aged limbs will carry him, he runs to assure himself. It is years since he ran like that, but love inspires him with strength, and makes his feet like hinds' feet. Away he goes over the lawn and through the adjoining meadow! The prodigal too has been thinking, as he has drawn nearer; and when he lifts up his eyes and beholds his father, he runs to meet him; they rush into each other's arms, and his father falls upon his neck with the kiss of reconciliation. He waits not to hear the boy's confession; the best proof of his repentance is that he is here at home again. But the sobs will come, the prodigal must confess, and he breaks out, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee; and am not worthy to be called thy son.' THAT WAS TRUE REPENTANCE. He cares not, he will black the boots, or groom the horses, or sit in the kitchen--anything so that he may be in his father's house, and enjoy his pardoning smile. Here are no excuses, no palliations, but a whole-hearted, honest confession of his guilt. The father accepts it, and in proof of his forgiveness he orders the ring, and the best robe, and the shoes to be put upon him, and says, 'Kill the fatted calf, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'

What says the great Word-painter who gives us this wonderful picture? 'Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.' Sinner, will you be that one?

O wanderer, knowing not the smile
Of Jesu's lovely face, In darkness living all the while,
Rejecting offered grace;
To thee Jehovah's voice doth sound,
Thy soul He waits to free;
Thy Saviour hath a ransom found,
There's mercy still for thee!

There's mercy still for thee
There's mercy still for thee
Poor trembling soul, He'll make thee whole--
There's mercy still for thee!

Long in the darkness thou hast strayed,
Away from joy and peace;
Thou hast these worldly pleasures tried,
But found them soon to cease.
Without one lingering ray of hope,
In anguish thou mayest be;
Oh! listen to the joyful sound,
There's mercy still for thee!

For thee, though sunk in deep despair,
Thy Saviour's Blood was shed;
He for thy sins was as a lamb
To cruel slaughter led,
That thou mayst find, poor sin-sick soul,
A pardon full and free;
What boundless grace,
what wondrous love,
There's mercy still for thee!

Though sins of years rise mountains high,
And would thy hopes destroy,
Thy Saviour's Blood can wash
away The stains, and bring thee joy.
Now lift thy heart in earnest prayer,
To Him for safety flee;
While still the angels chant the strain,
There's mercy still for thee!' H. H. B.

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