

Parables of Luke 15

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes God's boundless love and grace as illustrated through the parables of Luke 15, highlighting His joy in receiving repentant sinners.

Scripture: Luke 15:4

Topics: "The Prodigal Son", "God's Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on the parables of Luke 15, illustrating God's unwavering love and grace towards sinners. He emphasizes that despite humanity's sinfulness, God seeks and rejoices in the return of the lost, as seen in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. Darby highlights that God's joy in receiving sinners is not contingent on their worthiness but stems from His nature as a loving Father. The sermon encourages believers to understand their identity as children of God, free from guilt and shame, and to embrace the grace that God offers without conditions. Ultimately, it is a call to recognize the depth of God's love and the joy it brings to both heaven and earth.

Transcript

PARABLES OF LUKE 15

It is a wonderfully blessed thing to have One (the thoughts, and words, and ways of One down here, in His actings among men) who could so well manifest God, as the Lord Jesus.

We may look at the sin of man, at our sins, as a question to be judged of in the light of righteousness before God, and most important it is; but still, in one sense, God moves above all the evil, and asserts His right to shew what He is. And blessed is it for us, that God will be God in spite of sin. God is love ; and if He will be God, He must be love, and that notwithstanding all the reasonings and murmurings of the heart of man against Him. God will act upon what I may call the feelings of His heart, and make them find their way into the hearts of men. And that is the reason there is such a freshness in certain passages of the word of God, however often we recur to them, because God especially reveals Himself in them. God never fails; the moment He speaks and reveals Himself, we have always the full blessedness of what He is. It is Himself who has come forth, and that with power to our hearts-the blessed God. He will take no character from man. If He has to deal with sin, and shew what it is, and how He has put it away, and the like, still above and through all He will manifest Himself Now this is where our hearts get rest. We have the privilege to have done with ourselves in the house and bosom of God.

In a certain sense He hid Himself. Man could not have borne the manifestation of God in the brightness of glory; so He hid it in grace in the Person of the Son of man. He clothed Himself in flesh : but the effect of the wicked and heartless reasonings of man's corrupt judgment was this ; it forced Him to shew Himself what He really was as God. When He presented Himself as Messiah, the Son of man, the fulfiller of the law, and the like, this was not all the fulness of God. Man was always rejecting, constantly finding fault, carping at certain things with which he could not agree in the ways of Christ; but by thus pressing upon and urging Him, man only forced Him back as Christ to press out from Him what He really was as God. In the chapters which exhibit this, the soul is arrested and finds itself with unhesitating certainty in the presence of God Himself-in the presence of love. There we get rest and peace.

So in this chapter. He was forced to tell all the truth. God will be God. If there was that which could make God merry and glad, as it is expressed in the parable (and such was the case in the welcome of the poor prodigal son), He would have His own joy in spite of the objections of men. It is God's own joy to act in love; and that is just what men object to. They do not deny that He is going to judge (I do not of course speak of professed infidels) ; nor as a general principle do they object to God's being righteous, because their pride makes them think they can meet Him on that ground : but the moment He comes to have all His own full joy, and to bring out that which is the joy of heaven, man begins to object. It must not be all of grace ; not God dealing with publicans and sinners thus! and why not ? Because, what then becomes of man's righteousness ? God dealing in grace makes nothing of man's righteousness ; " there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Christ manifesting the light proved this ; pharisee and publican were alike detected ; and man hated it. The thing that levels down the moral condition of man, bringing in grace to the sinner, is what man cannot bear. It is the setting up of what God is, and the putting down man.

What man is always seeking to do is, to make a difference between the righteousness of one man and another, so that character may be sustained before men. Slighting God's righteousness and magnifying our own, always go together. In John 8 we find brought by the scribes and pharisees before Jesus, one who by the law was worthy of being stoned, undeniably guilty - that He might be obliged to deny either mercy or righteousness. This was their motive. They thought to place Him in an inextricable difficulty. If He should let her off, He would break the law of Moses ; but, should He say, 'let her be stoned,' it would be no more than Moses had done. How does He act? He let law and righteousness have all their course ; but tells her accusers at the same time, " He that is without sin amongst you, let him first cast a stone at her." Conscience begins to work; not rightly, it is true, for their character was what they cared about ; still it would speak ; and they get out of the presence of light, because the light made manifest what they were-it proved them sinners. From the eldest to the youngest, all went out. He that had the reputation of the longest standing was glad to be the first to go away from that eye which could penetrate and detect what was within ; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. He would not execute the law ; for He came not to judge: " neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." That which is produced is only love. Whenever one stood before Him, or had anything to do with Him as a detected and confessed sinner, it was always grace, and all grace. The more the discovered sin, the more grace was revealed, free and unqualified.

" Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." And after all it may seem strange to many that, if God did come down here, He should take no notice of the righteousness of man, but be found in the company of publicans and sinners. Why, that would upset all the moral righteous thoughts of

men ; and that is what God has to do, because they are wrongly based.

In all the parables of this chapter put forth by Jesus, because grace had been objected to, in His dealings with publicans and sinners, we have this one great and blessed thought-God manifested. ' I will suppose,' it is to say, ' a man in the worst and vilest possible condition you please ; one reduced to the degradation of feeding with swine. But then there is something still behind all this that I am going to bring out; something which even your own natural hearts ought to recognise - the father's delight in receiving back a child. Would not a father's heart justify itself in its own feelings of kindness, let the condition of the child be what it may ?

After weariness of heart in the world-after the Lord Jesus had gone through the world and found no place where a really broken heart could rest (He could find proud morality enough, but no place where a poor, wearied, broken heart could find sympathy and rest, to open it and give it life) - He came to shew that what could not be found for man anywhere else could be found in God. This is so blessed! that, after all, the poor wearied heart, wearied with itself, with its own ways, wearied with the world and everything, can find rest in the blessedness of the bosom of the Father ; and what it could not do in any other place-tell itself out-now that it has found God, it can ; and that in truth of heart too, as we read in Psalm 32: " Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." So long as I am afraid of being blamed for what may be discovered, there is guile in the heart ; but the moment that I know that all is forgiven, that nothing but love is drawn out by it, I can tell out all to God. The only thing that produces " truth in the inward parts " is the grace that imputes nothing. This is the secret of God's power in setting hearts right with Himself-:' there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.' There is all the difference possible between finding a man flying from God by reason of his conscience, and his finding in God one who says " neither do I condemn thee " ; what in truth relieves and heals a conscience completely convicted. We cannot in our actual state, if under the law, and acknowledging its righteousness, take it into our own hands. If I take the law to smite you, I must kill myself; it is too sharp to handle. The man who would stone the adulteress must put his own head under the weight of the blow. " O wretched man that I am! " If I am a man, I am undone.

We have three parables presented to us in the chapter. The source of that which is taught in them all is love. The first parable is that of the shepherd who sought the sheep that was lost. The second that of the woman who sought the piece of money that was lost. The third, the father's reception of the returning prodigal.

In the last it is not a question of seeking, but of the manner of the father's receiving the son when he had come back. And this is of much importance. Our souls need to understand it aright, as well as to know the great cardinal truth that God seeks the lost. There is many a heart that longs to go back, but does not know how he will be received. The Lord Jesus tells us the grace and love of God are shewn out, first in seeking, and then in the reception. In the first two parables we have the seeking ; in the third, the reception by the father. One great principle runs through them all ; it is the joy of God to seek and to receive the sinner. He is acting upon His own character. No doubt it is joy to the sinner to be received, but it is the joy of God to receive him: " it is meet that we should make merry and be glad "-not merely meet that the child should be glad to be in the house : the father is the happy one. The return of the prodigal is joy in heaven, whatever men, whatever Pharisees, may think about it.

Beloved friends, this is a blessed truth! It is the tone that God has raised, and that every heart in heaven responds to. It is something wonderfully lovely to be let into heaven in this way ; and that, too by One who knew heaven so well. The chord which God strikes Himself heaven responds to and re-echoes, and so must every heart down here that is tuned by grace. What discord then must self-righteousness produce! Jesus tells forth the joy and grace of God in thus acting, the joy of heaven, and puts all this in contrast with the feelings of the elder brother-those of any self-righteous person-though the description be of the Jews.

It is this note sounded from heaven in love, that we read in the heart and ways of Christ down here: " The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." And oh, how sweet! In one sense it is more sweet to have it; here than up there. It is down here that this love of God (and it must be here, if man is to be reached) is astonishing; it is natural in heaven. It is here, on earth, amongst us, that God has manifested what He is-that He has delight in saving lost sinners ; " which things the angels desire to look into,"

The first thing the Lord Jesus does is to justify God in being good to sinners. He appeals at once to the natural heart of man. " What man of you, having an hundred sheep ? " etc. The shepherd puts the sheep upon his shoulder, and brings it home rejoicing-have I not a right to seek lost sinners ? Is it not a right thing for God to come among publicans and sinners ? This may not suit a moral man, but it suits God ; it is His privilege to come amidst sin-to come near to ruined sinners - because He can deliver out of it. The shepherd lays the sheep upon his shoulders and rejoices ; he goes out to seek it, charges himself with it ; he takes the whole toil of it. It was his own interest to do it, because he valued the sheep ; it was his, and he brings it home again rejoicing. Thus He presents the shepherd here. And thus it is with " the Great Shepherd of the sheep." He presents it as His interest to " seek and to save that which is lost " : He even makes it His interest in the sense of love ; the sheep is His own, and He brings it home rejoicing, bidding others to rejoice with Him. There is the strength and power of salvation.

But how does the Lord set about it ? We tell people sometimes to seek Christ. Well, in one sense that is right ; for it is quite true that " he that seeketh findeth " ; but He never said, "Come unto me," until He had first come to them, - come "to seek and to save that which was lost." He did not say it from heaven, for the sinner could not go there ; but because the poor sinner could not go to heaven to seek Christ, Christ came to the earth to seek him. He does not say to the poor leper, Come up to heaven ; but comes Himself down to the leper in all his need, and says, " Be thou clean." Had any other laid his hand upon the leper it would have made him as unclean as himself ; Christ alone could touch the power of evil in the leper and have no contamination, but dispel it. He says, " Come unto me, all ye that labour ... and I will give you rest." It is not to be found here, any more than it was for Noah's dove amidst the deluge. I have tried the world all through, and it is a sea of evil without a shore ; Come to Me, and you will find rest. Who but Jesus could have said this ?

There is another thing in the second parable-the painstaking of this love, its eager diligence with determination to succeed in seeking that which has been lost. It is not a sheep, but money in a house. Everything is done to get the money. The woman lights the candle, sweeps the house, she could not stop in the task of love-diligent active love, until the piece was found. It was her affair and interest again, because the money was hers. And then we have the joy when her possession is recovered ; her own joy and the tone given to those who are called in to have communion with it: " Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost." And that is the way of the Lord.

Thus we have the same great principle in this parable as in the former. There is the patient activity of love in the use of means by the Holy Spirit until the result is produced. In both parables we see the absolute actings of grace, without any reference to the effect in the heart of the sinner ; also, in both this great principle (common, as noticed before, to the three), God's own joy in love. It was the joy of the woman, as of the shepherd. Thus the result of man's pharisaic objection to grace was but the bringing out of the declaration by Jesus of the energetic power and activity of this grace, as well as the good will. There was entire inactivity in the sheep and in the money. The piece of money, as the sheep, could do nothing. The shepherd and the woman alike did all; it was their joy, who had lost, to get them back again, because they valued them. Worth nothing, in a certain sense, to God's love the sinner is immensely valuable.

It is true, at the same time, that there is a most important work-an effect produced in the heart of the one who has gone astray and is brought back again. On this account we have the third parable, which shews the feelings of the wanderer; and further, the manner of his reception. The father's heart and the prodigal's are both laid open. Not only are the inward workings of the prodigal told out, but we have also the manifestation of the father's heart. In a word, it is not the estimate formed by the one brought back about the love of the father, that gives the answer to all his thoughts, but the manifestation of his own heart by the father. There is this one simple fact, the father is on his neck kissing him! and that tells him what that heart is.

In this last parable the Lord takes up a case, meeting the objection of the Pharisees to His receiving publicans and sinners. He says, as it were, I will take the case of a man brought to the utmost degradation-eating husks with the swine (we must remember what swine were to the Jew) , there too of his own choice. Why was the picture drawn thus ? To shew that nothing could put the sinner beyond the reach of grace. Trace it as far as you please ; God will act as God at the end of the story. Let us look a little at the case in detail (v. H-13). This is just our history as men. The son here was happier far, as a man, when going from home than when returning; he was doing his own will. And this is the secret of all sin. But remark, whether we are living in vice or not, we have all turned our back on God. The young man was as great a sinner when he stepped rich across his father's threshold, as when feeding with the swine in the far country ; he had chosen to act independently of God, and that is sin. He reaped the fruits afterwards of this, no doubt, but that is not the question. Nay, in one sense, the very consequences of his sin were mercies, because they shewed him what his sin was.

But man makes a distinction between sinners. So the Lord puts a case where the sinner is gone, even in man's judgment, to the fullest degree of evil, and shews it does not outreach the grace of God - a case which wonderfully exhibits the truth, that " if sin abounds, grace does much more abound.." When he first left the house he shewed where his heart was alienated, revolted, gone; his back was turned upon his father and his father's house, and his face was towards the far country. He went forth to do his own will. A parent's heart will understand it. Our child sins against us-we feel it. We sin against God, and do not feel it. We are all of us in that sense children, that " have turned every one to his own way."

" And there," having reached the far country, he went on gaily in his own will as long as he could; "he wasted his substance in riotous living." Any person who lives beyond his means looks rich for a time ; so does the sinner, wasting his soul, seem happy. But if he thinks himself happy, he does so because he has got to a distance from God, where he has no restraint upon his will. But then, after all, he is in the devil's country, and enslaved to him. Liberty of will is just slavery to the devil.

" And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat : and no one gave unto him." There is no giving in the " far country," not even of husks. Satan sells all, and dearly-our souls are the price. You must buy everything. The world's principle is ' nothing for nothing ' ; everything must bring its price. Your gratifications there must be purchased at the sacrifice of reputation and soul. If you sell yourself to the devil, you win get husks : he will never give you anything. Would you find a giver, you must come to God. Hearts are not easy in the world ; leave a man for a few hours to himself, and he will soon be in want ; but it is never the effect of this merely to bring back to God. " He began to be in want," but his will was not touched yet. There are very few hearts that have arrived at a certain time of life, that have not " begun to be in want." They go to seek in pleasure or in vice (in one thing or another, it matters not what; last of all, in God) something to satisfy them. The last thing the world thinks of is God : and then only when they are convinced that nothing else will do. They never think of the Father's house, for they know it not. If indeed they think of God, it is in judgment, not in grace. A man of the world says, You must have everything that is in the world to know that the world cannot satisfy you ; but the knowledge that all the world cannot satisfy would never turn a man to God. He must know more, even that he is perishing; not merely not satisfied, but ruined. So it was with the prodigal.

" 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! 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." He awoke to the consciousness, " I perish with hunger " ; and then it was he thought of " the father's house," the very place he had been so anxious to get away from at first. He had not yet understood how he would be received, yet he did understand that there was love in that house (the very hired servants had bread enough and to spare) ; and he did understand, too, not only that he was hungry, but perishing with hunger. He wanted the goodness of that house; his was no mere abstract delighting in it. Wisdom and philosophy never found out God: He makes Himself known to us through our need ; necessity finds him out. Who is it that really discovers the value of bread ? The chemist ? No ; a hungry man. The sinner's heart-yes, and the saint's heart too-is put in its right place in this way. I doubt much if we have ever learned anything solidly, except we have learnt it thus. He knew that all was goodness there, the very servants were happy, and it was all over with him where he was ; the need of his condition, all told him he must get back: " I will arise," etc. ; but he did not yet know the extent of that goodness. Every soul that returns to God is thus brought to the thought of goodness in God.

We see the same thing in Peter (Luke 5). He goes and falls at the feet of Jesus, and says, " Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." What an inconsistency! at the knees of Jesus, and yet telling Him to go away. And there is often this apparent inconsistency where there is a work in the conscience and the affections. God becomes necessary to us, and yet conscience says, I am too sinful. Peter felt his own worthlessness, and that Jesus was too holy, too righteous, to be with such an one as he; and yet he could not help going to Him.

Well, the prodigal goes back, glad to be in the father's house, but having no true estimate of the father's heart. No more worthy to be called a son, " make me as one of thy hired servants," was still his thought. He measured the father's love in some little degree by the sense of what he had done and the evil in which he had been ; he thought to get into the place of a servant. Now there are a multitude of hearts in this state, lowering down the standard of what the Father must do to some sort of adaptedness to their fitness

(I am not speaking of positive self-righteousness) ; they have still the remains of legalism, and would take the place of a servant in the house. Now God can only receive us in grace, because we have spent all, ruined ourselves, and forfeited every claim upon Him. Look at the history before us. This " make me as one of thy hired servants " will not do for the father, if it would do for the son ; it would be constant misery to the father's heart, as well as degradation to the son to receive and treat him thus 1 his very condition in the house a constant memorial of his sin! Neither would it be testimony to the servants in the house, as to the father's love. The father cannot have sons in his house as servants ; if boundless grace brings them, he must shew the manner of the reception to be worthy of a father's love. The prodigal was not yet brought to thorough humbleness - to feel it must be grace or nothing. But the father does not even give him time to say, " Make me as one of thy hired servants! " He lets him tell out the confession of his sin, " I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," but no more ; for he is on his neck kissing him. How could he say, " Make me a hired servant," when his father is on his neck, producing the consciousness that he was a son ?

The prodigal's judgment about the father must now be drawn from what the father actually is to him, and not from any abstract reasonings about it. The one was a father, if the other was not a son. And that is the true way of receiving the gospel of the grace of God. It is not the working of my mind as to what I am before God, but the revelation by the Holy Ghost of what the Father is to me ; and if He is a Father, I am a son. I dwell on this, because I know there are so many souls who have not, as it were, received the spirit of adoption fully; neither knowing what they are as sons in the house of the Father, nor finding their rest in the love of the Father.

See again the manner of the reception of the prodigal here. He determined in his own mind now renewed what he would do, what he would say, and the conditions of his reception: he says, " I will arise," etc. But before he has time to reach the father's house and say all this, " while he was yet a great way off," we read, the father saw him, and had compassion on him. The son's path is now lost in the father's love: the father runs to meet him, falls on his neck and kisses him. There is nothing in the son but confession of unworthiness. Once received, we are left, as it were, to discover what were his thoughts and feelings by the knowledge of the father's. And so entirely is it in the estimate of our salvation : we are left to discover what we are in the revelation of the love of the Father. The father is on his neck, while all the rags of the far country are upon him. Was it for anything in the son ? No ; it was because of the love that was in his own heart. The father does not stop to ask him anything: he knows he has acted very wrongly, it would have been no use to say, You have disgraced me, dishonoured my name; he could see that very well. It was no question of fitness or worthiness in the son : the father's heart did not reason in that way ; he was acting from himself and for himself-worthily as a father. He was on his neck, because the father loves to be there. It is the love that is in God, not any loveliness in the sinner that accounts for the extravagant liberality of his reception in Christ.

It is the knowledge of the Father's love that makes me feel what I am. But if I know my sins are forgiven, and the Father is on my neck kissing me, then the more I know of my sins, while I know the Father's love, the happier I am; Luke 7 : 47. Suppose a merchant having liabilities which he knows himself unable to meet; he would be afraid to look fairly through his books: but suppose on the other hand the debt was discharged, and that he had the certainty of an immense fund of riches after all was paid-if some friend had done it all-he would no longer be afraid to look at them. The discovery of the extent of his obligation would only serve to enhance the sense of his friend's love. If, instead 1,000, he found his debt had been 10,000, he would say, Why, this is better than I thought ; and if, on looking further, he found the amount

100,000 - Well, there never was a friend like this friend of mine! Grace has put all away ; therefore the whole effect of the discovery of sin, when we know forgiveness, is but to enhance the love and heighten the joy. If the Father is kissing me, the very consciousness that He is doing it while I am in my rags, proves what a forgiveness it is. There is not another in the whole world who would not have thought of my rags, before he was on my neck.

But he does another thing. The servants are called now to introduce him into the house fittingly. " 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," etc. God shews His love towards us as wretched sinners, but then clothes us with Christ. He brings us into the house where the servants are, with nothing less than all the honour He can put upon us. His love welcomes us while in our rags, but here the same love acts in another way. He introduces us into the house as He would have us be there, with His mind expressed about the value of a son. We read here the description of the robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf, and the feast of joy that welcomes the returning prodigal. The father's mind was, that a son of his was worth it all ; and that it was worthy of him to give it. How little worthy would it have been of a father, acting in grace, to keep him as a servant in the house!

There are, perhaps, some who would think it humility to desire the servant's place in the house. But it is not so ; it is only ignorance of the Father's mind. I read, " that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Now if you begin at that end-the Father's mind and grace-would it have been worthy of Him to have put us in the house with a constant memorial of our sin and shame-of our former dishonour and degradation ? If there was any sense of shame, the merest trace of the far country, would it have been worthy of the father ? No! " The worshipper once purged has no more conscience of sins." The condition that finds its place in God's house must be worthy of God.

Take another case. Perhaps our wretched unbelieving hearts may say, Ah, that will be quite true when there-when really in the Father's house. Let me ask what faith is. Faith judges as God judges. I see sin in the light of God's holiness. I judge it most truly when I see its opposition to Him, and the dishonour it puts on Him. I learn grace, too, in the heart of my Father. He that believes sets to his seal that God is true. Faith is the only thing that gives certainty ; reasoning does not. Reasoning may be all quite well for the things of this world; but if God speaks about anything, faith believes; faith sets to its seal, not that it may be perhaps, but " that God is true." Now having this, I am as sure that it is true as if I were now in heaven.

" Abraham believed God," not in God (though that is also true), but God: he believed that what God said was true. And this is what we ought to do : the first point is to believe God. What then does He tell me if I am a believer in His Son ? That my sins and iniquities are remembered no more, and I believe it ; that I have eternal life, I believe that too ; it were sin to doubt it. If I do not believe what He assures me of, I wrong God. It is a sin not to believe myself a son, that I am in God's presence without a spot of sin, through the blood of the Lamb. Faith believes this : God has said it. If it were only my own righteousness, it must be torn to shreds ; but it is the blood of the Lamb: and what has that done? -cleansed half my sins ? The question is, What is God's estimate of the value of the blood of Jesus ? do you think that God limits the efficacy of His blood ? No! He says, it cleanses from all sin. If we go on to see further, it is-who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree. Is it some of my sins ? It is my sins. If my soul knows on the one hand the value to God of the blood of the Lamb, I know on the other hand that it all results from the love of the Father. It would be an evil thing to doubt this love, as it would have been an evil thing in the prodigal, when the father was kissing him, to say, I have the rags of the far country upon me. Did he then

think of his rags as a reason why there should not be that expression of the love which was in the heart of his father ? Thus when I see here the character Christ gives of what God is towards me as a sinner (and He was forced to do this by the self-righteousness of the Pharisees - of man), the doubts of my heart are silenced before such grace.

Is there one who would say, that divine grace sanctions sin? Let him read his judgment in the spirit of the elder brother here. Yet let even such an one see how grace speaks to him. " Therefore came his father out, and entreated him." We see the patience of love towards this wretched man-not merely a poor prodigal-but this wretched one who shared not in the general joy. The servants were glad; they say, " Thy brother is come, and thy father has killed for him the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." All catch the tone of joy but one; and who was he ? The man who thought of self and self-righteousness therefore came his father out and entreated him."

Take care of that, lest your hearts be turning to sourness the love and grace that God shews to a fellow sinner. " He would not go in." The father reasons with him-" it was meet that we should make merry and be glad ; for this [not my son, but] thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found." Love is high enough up for anything; but in vain, he could not enter into the spirit that actuated all in the house, from the father down to the lowest menial. He remained without, and had none of the happiness and none of the joy; there was in him manifested opposition of heart to the riches of the father's grace ; and this is man.

Do you know God thus ? You would know yourselves too. Be it so ; it is indeed well; but do not call God's heart in question because of that. How can I know God's heart ? Is it by looking into my own heart ? No ; but by learning it in the gift of His Son. The God we have to do with is the God who has given His Son for sinners and if we do not know this, we do not know Him at all. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ? " (Rom. 8 ' 32.) Do not be saying to God, Make me as one of thy hired servants. All true service must result from the knowledge of Himself. Do not be putting the estimate of your own hearts on God's goodness, Our hearts have such a tendency to turn back to legalism, and think it humility. The only real humbleness and strength and blessing is to forget self in the presence and blessedness of God. We may be brought thither by a humbling process ; but it is not in thinking evil of self merely, that we are truly humble : we have the privilege of forgetting ourselves in the manifestation of the love of God and our Father, who is love to us.

The Lord grant you, through Jesus, to know, as poor sinners, God thus revealed in love.

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