

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

by Martyn-Lloyd Jones

The parable of the prodigal son teaches us that there is still hope for a new start and a new beginning, even for the most desperate, and that this hope is offered to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:14

Topics: "Deception And Sin", "Discerning Truth"

Description

The preacher delves into the root meaning of 'deceive' in the Bible, emphasizing how it involves leading astray, misleading, and enticing to sin. The sermon focuses on the dangers of being deceived by empty words, false beliefs, and underhanded tactics, warning against justifying sinful lifestyles with deceptive arguments. Through the analysis of key Bible verses, the preacher highlights the consequences of deception and the importance of discerning truth from falsehood to avoid falling into transgression and facing the wrath of God.

Transcript

THERE IS NO PARABLE OR SAYING OF OUR LORD that is quite as well-known and as familiar as the parable of the prodigal son. No parable is quite so frequently quoted in religious discussions or made use of to support theories and contentions. It is truly astonishing to note the almost endless number of ways it is so used and the almost infinite variety of conclusions to which it is said to lead. All schools of thought seem to claim a right to it; that it is used to prove all sorts of theories and ideas that are mutually destructive and that exclude one another. It is quite clear, therefore, that the parable can be very easily and readily mishandled and misinterpreted. How can we avoid that danger? What are the principles that should guide us as we interpret it? It seems to me that there are two fundamental principles which, if observed, will guarantee a correct interpretation.

The first is that we must always beware of interpreting any portion of Scripture in a way that conflicts with the general teaching of Scripture elsewhere. The New Testament must be approached as a whole. It is a complete and entire revelation given by God through His servants, a revelation that has been revealed in parts and sections, all of which go together to make a complete whole. There are obviously, therefore, no contradictions among these various parts, no clashes, no irreconcilable passages and statements. This is not to say that we can understand every single statement. What I do say is that there are no contradictions in Scripture. To suggest that the teachings of Jesus Christ and Paul, or the teachings of Paul and the other apostles, do not agree is subversive of the entire claim of the New Testament itself and of the church's

claim for it throughout the centuries, until the rise of the so called higher-critical school some hundred years ago. I need not go into this matter this evening. Let it suffice to say that it is only the more superficial critics, who are by now many years behind the times, who still try to make and force an antithesis between what they call "the religion of Jesus" and the "faith of St. Paul." Scripture is to be compared with Scripture. Every theory we evolve must be tested by the solid body of doctrine and dogma found in the entire Bible and defined by the church. Were this simple rule remembered, the vast majority of heresies would never have arisen.

The second rule is a little more particular. It is that we should always avoid the danger of drawing any negative conclusions from the teaching of a parable. This applies not only to this particular parable, but to all parables. A parable is never meant to be a full outline of truth. Its business is to convey one great lesson, to present one big aspect of positive truth. That being its object and purpose, nothing is so foolish as to draw negative conclusions from it. That certain things are not said in the parable means nothing. A parable is important, and matters only, not from the point of view of what it does not say, but from the point of view of what it does say. Its value is entirely and exclusively positive and in no respect negative.

Now I suggest to you that the failure to remember that simple rule has been responsible for most of the strange and fantastic theories and ideas that have been propounded supposedly on the basis of the parable of the prodigal son. That this should have been possible at all is surely astonishing, for if those who have done this had only looked at the two other parables in the same chapter, they would have seen at once how unjustifiable was their procedure. Why not draw negative conclusions from those also? And so with all parables?

But apart from that, how utterly ridiculous and illogical it is to base your system of doctrine on what is not said. How dishonest it is! It does away with all authority and leaves you with no standard except your own prejudice and your own desire and your own imagination. Now that, I say, is what has been done so frequently with this parable.

Let me illustrate by reminding you of some of the false conclusions that have been drawn from it. Is this not the parable to which they constantly refer who try to prove that ideas of justice and judgment and wrath are utterly and entirely foreign to God's nature and to Jesus' teaching concerning Him? "There is nothing here," they say, "of the father's wrath, nor the father's demands for certain actions on the part of the son just love, pure love, nothing but love." This is a typical example of a negative conclusion drawn from the parable. Because it does not positively teach the justice and the wrath of God, we are told that such qualities do not belong to God at all. That Jesus Christ elsewhere emphasizes these qualities is of course also completely and entirely ignored.

Another example is the way in which we are told that this parable does away with the absolute necessity for repentance. I have heard of a preacher who tried to prove that the prodigal was a humbug even when he returned home, that he had decided to say something which sounded right, though he did not believe it at all, in order to impress his father, that his exact repetition of the words proves the case. The ultimate point is that in spite of this, in spite of a sham repetition, in spite of all, the father forgave. The final clinching argument of this preacher was that the father said nothing about repentance. Therefore, because he said nothing, repentance does not matter; because repentance is not taught and impressed upon the son by the father, repentance towards God does not matter!

But perhaps the most serious of all the false conclusions is that which tells us that no mediator between God and man is necessary, and that the idea of atonement is foreign to the gospel and is to be attributed rather to the legalistic mind of Paul. "There is no mention in the parable," they say, "of anyone coming between the father and the son. There is no talk at all about another paying a ransom, or making an atonement; just the direct dealing between father and son conditioned solely upon the latter's return from the far country." Because those things are not specifically mentioned and stressed in the parable, it is agreed that they do not count at all and really do not matter. As if our Lord's object in the parable was to give a complete outline of the whole of the Christian truth, and not just to teach one aspect of the truth. Surely it must be obvious to you that if a like procedure were adopted in the case of all parables, the position would be utterly chaotic. We would be faced with a mass of contradictions.

The business of a parable then is to present to us and to teach us one great positive truth. And if ever that should be clear and self-evident, it is in this particular case. It is no mere accident that this parable is one of three parables. Our Lord seems to have gone out of His way to protect us against the very danger to which I have been referring. But apart even from that, the key to the whole situation is provided in the first two verses of the chapter, which provide us with the essential background and context. "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" (Luke 15:1-2). Then follow these three parables, obviously dealing with that precise situation and obviously meant to reply to the murmurings of the Pharisees and scribes. And, as if to enforce it still further, our Lord draws a certain moral or conclusion at the end of each parable.

The great point, surely, is that there is hope for all, that God's love extends even to the publicans and sinners. The glorious truth that shines out in these Parables, and which is meant to be impressed upon us, is God's amazing love, its scope and its reach. It especially contrasts the ideas of the Pharisees and scribes on that subject.

The first two parables are designed to impress upon us the love of God as an activity which seeks out the sinner, which takes infinite trouble in order to find him and rescue him, and to show the joy of God and all the host of heaven when even one soul is saved. And then comes this parable of the prodigal son. Why this addition? Why the greater elaboration? Why a man, rather than a sheep or a lost coin? Surely there can be but one answer. As the first two parables have stressed God's activity alone without telling us anything about the actions or reactions or condition of the sinner, so this parable is spoken to impress that aspect and that side of the matter, lest anyone should be so foolish as to think that we should all be automatically saved by God's love even as the sheep and the lost coin were found.

The great outstanding point is still the same, but its application is made more direct and more personal. What, then, is the teaching of this parable, what is its message to us this evening? Let us look at it along the following lines.

A Parable of a New Beginning

The first truth it proclaims is the possibility of a new beginning, the possibility of a new start, a new opportunity, another chance. The very context and setting of the parable, as I have reminded you already, shows this perfectly. It was because they had sensed and seen this in His teaching that the publicans and sinners drew "near unto Him for to hear Him" (Luke 15:1). They felt that there was a chance even for them, that in this man's teachings there was a new and a fresh hope. And even the Pharisees and scribes saw

precisely the same thing. What annoyed them was that our Lord should have had anything at all to do with publicans and sinners. They had regarded such people as being utterly and entirely beyond hope and beyond redemption. That was the orthodox view to take of such people. They were so hopeless that they were to be entirely ignored. Religion was for good people and had nothing at all to do with bad people. It certainly had nothing to give them, and it most certainly did not command good people to mix with bad people and treat them kindly and tell them of new possibilities. So the Pharisees and scribes were annoyed by our Lord's teaching. Anyone who saw any hope for a publican or sinner must, to them, be entirely wrong and a blasphemer. The same point exactly emerges in the parable in the different attitudes of the father and the elder brother toward the prodigal. The point is not how he should be received back, but whether he should be received back, whether he deserved anything at all.

That is what stands out on the very surface. There is a possibility of a new start, a new beginning for all, even for the most desperate. No case can be worse than that of the prodigal son. Yet even he can start again. He has touched bottom, he has sunk to the very dregs, he has gone down so low that he could not possibly descend any further. Never has a more hopeless picture been drawn than that of this boy in the far country amidst the husks and the swine, penniless and friendless, utterly hopeless and forlorn, utterly desolate and dejected. But even he gets a fresh start, even he is called to make a new beginning. There is a turning point that leads on to fortune and to happiness even for him.

What a blessed gospel, and especially in a world like this! What a difference the coming of Jesus Christ has made! What new hope for mankind appeared in Him! There is nothing that so demonstrated and proved that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only really optimistic philosophy and view of life offered to man, so much as the fact the publicans and sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the message they heard, as in this parable of the prodigal son, was something entirely new.

But I would have you note that it was not only new to the Jews and their leaders, but also new to the whole world. The hope held out to the vile and hopeless by the gospel not only cut across the miserable system of the Jews, but also the philosophy of the Greeks. Those mighty men had been evolving their theories and their philosophies. Yet not one of them had anything to offer to the down and out. They all demanded a certain amount of intelligence and moral integrity and purity. They all had to postulate much in the human nature for which they catered. Nor were they realists. They wrote and spoke in a learned and fascinating manner about their utopias and their ideal states, but they left mankind exactly where it was, and were entirely divorced from ordinary life and living. The only people who have ever been in a position even to try the idealistic and humanistic methods of solving the problems of life have been the wealthy and the leisured, and even they have invariably found that they do not work. There was not, and there never had been, any hope for the hopeless in the world before Jesus Christ came. He alone taught the possibility of a new start and a new beginning.

But that teaching was not only new then, during His days on earth, it is still new. And it is still surprising and astonishing and amazes the modern world quite as much as it amazed the ancient world of nearly 2,000 years ago. For the world is still without hope, and its controlling philosophy is still profoundly pessimistic. This is to be seen most clearly, perhaps, when it tries to be optimistic, for we see always that when it tries to comfort us it always has to point us to the future with its unknown possibilities. It tells us that in the new year things surely must be better, that they cannot at any rate be any worse. It argues that the depression must have lasted so long that surely the turn of the tide must of necessity be at hand. It is glad that one year has ended and that a new one is beginning.

What is the real secret of a new year? Its real secret lies in that we know nothing at all about it. All we know is bad, therefore we try to comfort ourselves by looking to what is unknown and by fondly imagining that it must be brighter and better. Then listen to it as it talks about its schemes and plans for the uplift of mankind. All it can tell you is that it is trying to make a better world for its children, trying to build for the future and for posterity. Always in the future! It can do nothing for itself, it can only hope to make things better for those who are yet unborn. And the longer it goes on talking about that and trying to do it, the more hesitant does it become. To prove this, just compare the language of 1875 with that of 1935, or even that of 1905 with 1935.

But if the situation is like that with regard to society in general and at large, how infinitely more hopeless and filled with despair is it when we face it in a more individual and in a more personal sense! What has the world to offer by way of solution to the problems that tend to distress us most of all! The answer to that question is to be seen in the frantic efforts that men and women are making in their attempts to solve their problems. And yet nothing is more clearly seen than the fact that all their attempts are failures.

Year after year men and women make their new resolutions. They realize that above all else what is needed is a fresh start and a new beginning. They decide to turn their backs on the past, to turn over a new leaf, or even to start a new book of life. That is their desire, that is their firm conviction and intention. They want to break with the past and for a time they do their utmost to do so, but it doesn't last. Gradually but inevitably they slide back to the old position and to the old state of affairs. And after a few such experiences they no longer try, and come to the conclusion that all is hopeless. Up to a point, the fight is kept up and maintained, but sheer weariness and fatigue eventually overcome them, the pressure and the might of the world and its way seem to be entirely on the other side and they give in. The position seems to be utterly hopeless.

I wonder how many there are, even in this service now, who feel like that in some respect or other! Do you feel that your life had gone wrong, has gone astray? Are you forever mocked by "the haunting spectre of the might-have-been?" Do you feel that you have got yourself into such a position, and into such a situation, that you can never get out of it and put yourself right again? Do you feel that you are so far away from what you ought to be, and from what you would like to be, that you can never get there again? Do you feel hopeless about yourself because of some situation with which you are confronted, or because of some entanglement in which you have got involved, or because of some sin which has mastered you and which you cannot conquer? Have you turned to yourself and said, "What is the use of making any further effort, what is the use of trying again? I have tried and tried many and many a time before, but all to no purpose, and my trying now can lead to but the same result. I have made a mess of my life, I have forfeited my chance and my opportunity, and henceforth I have nothing to do but to make the best of a bad job."

Are such your thoughts and your feelings? Is it your position that you have missed your opportunity in life, that what has been has been, that if only you have another chance things might be different, but that cannot be, and there it is? Is it that? Alas! How many there are in such a position. How unhappy are the lives of the average man and woman. How hopeless! How sad!

Now the very first word of the gospel to people like that is that they should lift up their heads, that all is not lost, that there is still hope, still the possibility of a new start and a new beginning, here and now without any delay at all, and without looking to the slightest extent on something imaginary that may belong to the unknown future, but rather by leaning on something that happened in the past nearly 2,000 years ago, but

which is as strong and as powerful today as it was then. Even the prodigal can get right. There is a possible turning point even along the blackest and the most hopeless road. There is a new beginning offered even to the publicans and sinners.

Conditions Attached

But I must hasten to point out in detail what I have already indicated in passing, that this message of the gospel is not something vague and general like the world's message, but something to which definite conditions are attached. And it is here we see most clearly why it was that our Lord spoke this particular parable in addition to the other two. To avail ourselves of this new beginning and new start which is offered by the gospel, we must observe the following points. Oh! let me impress upon you the importance of doing this. If you merely sit there and listen and allow yourselves to be moved in general by the glowing picture of the gospel, you will go home exactly as you were when you came. But if, on the other hand, you attend carefully and note each point and act upon it, you will find yourself going home an entirely different person. If you are anxious to avail yourself of the gospel's new hope and new start, you must follow its methods and instructions. What are they?

The first is that we must face our position squarely, honestly and truly. It is one thing to be in a bad and difficult position, it is quite a different thing to face it honestly. This prodigal son had been in a thoroughly bad situation for a very long time before he truly realized it. A man does not suddenly get into that state in which he is described here. It happened gradually, almost unbeknown to himself. And even after it happened, he did not properly realize it for some time. The process is so quiet and so insidious that the man himself scarcely sees it at all. He looks at his face in the mirror every day and does not see the changes that are taking place. It is someone who only sees him at intervals who sees the effects most clearly. And often when we begin to sense our terrible plight, we deliberately avoid thinking about it. We brush such thoughts aside and busy ourselves with other matters, more or less saying to ourselves as we do so, "What's the use of thinking, here I am anyhow." But the very first step back is to face the issue, to face the situation honestly and clearly. We are told that this young man "came to himself" (v. 17). That is actually what the man did! He faced things out with himself and did so quite frankly. He saw that his troubles were entirely due to his own actions, that he had been a fool, and that he should never have left his father, and should certainly never have treated him as he had done. He looked at himself and could scarcely believe that it really was himself. He looked at the husks and at the swine. He faced it directly.

Have you done that? Have you really looked at yourself? What if you put all your actions of the past year down on paper? What if you had kept a record of all your thoughts and desires, your ambitions and imaginings? Would you consent to their publication with your name beneath them? What are you now in comparison with what you once were? Look at your hands, are they clean? Look at your lips, are they pure? Look at your feet, where have they trodden, where have they been? Look at yourself! Is it really you? Then look around you at your position and surroundings! Do not shirk it! Be honest! What are you living on? Is it food or swine's husks?

On what have you spent your money? For what purpose have you used money that should perhaps have gone to feed your wife and children or to clothe them? On what have you been living? Look! Is it food fit for men? Look at what you enjoy. Face it calmly. Is it worthy of a creature created by God with intelligence and understanding? Does it honor man, let alone God? Is it swine's food or is it really fit for human consumption? It is not enough that you should just bemoan your fate or feel miserable. How did you ever get into such a state and condition? Look at the swine and the husks and realize that it is all because you

have left your Father's house, that you have deliberately gone against your conscience, deliberately flouted religion and all its commands and dictates, that it has been entirely and utterly of your own doing. You are where you are today entirely as the result of your own choice and your own actions. Face that and admit it. That is the first essential step on the way back.

The next is to realize that there is only One to whom you can turn and only one thing to do. I need not work out that point in detail in connection with the prodigal. It is perfectly clear. "No man gave unto him" (v. 16). He had tried and had exhausted his own efforts and the efforts of all other people.

He was finished and no one could help him. There was but one left. Father! The last, the only hope. The gospel always insists upon our coming to that point. As long as you have a penny of your own left, the gospel will not help you. As long as you have friends or agencies to which you can apply for help and which you believe can help you, the gospel will give you nothing. Actually, of course, as long as a man thinks he can keep himself going by some of these other methods, he will continue to try to do so. And the world is far from being bankrupt in our estimation still. It still believes in its own methods and ideas.

How pathetically we cling to them! We bank on our own willpower and our own efforts. We draw upon the new years of our calendar as if they made the slightest difference to the actual state of affairs! We invoke the aid of friends and companions and of relations and dear ones. Ah! you know all about the process, not only in your attempts to put yourself right, but also in your attempts to put others right about whom you are concerned and worried. And on we will go until we have exhausted all. Like the prodigal, we go on until we become frantic and until "no man give unto us." Then and then only do we turn to God. Oh! how foolish.

Let me try to explode the fallacy here and now. Face it frankly. Realize that all your efforts must fail as they have always failed. Realize that the improvement will only be transient and temporary. Cease to fool yourself. Realize how desperate the position is. Realize further that there is only one power that can put you right—the power of Almighty God. You can go on trusting yourself and others and trying with all our might. But a year from tonight the position will not only be the same, but actually worse. God alone can save you.

But as you turn to Him, you must realize further that you can plead nothing before Him except His mercy and His compassion. As the prodigal left home, his great word was "give."

He demanded his rights. He was full of self-confidence, and he even had a feeling that he was not being given his due and his rights. "Give!" But when he returns home, his vocabulary has changed and his word now is "make." Before, he felt he was someone and somebody and something which could demand rights worthy of itself and of himself. Now he feels he is nobody and nothing and realizes that his first need is to be made into something. "Make me!" he said.

If you feel that you have any right to demand pardon and forgiveness from God, I can assure you that you are damned and lost. If you feel that it is God's business and God's duty to forgive you, you will most certainly not be forgiven. If you feel God is hard and against you, you are guilty of the greatest sin of all. If you feel still that you are somebody and that you have a right to say "give," you will receive nothing but misery and continued wretchedness.

But if you realize that you have sinned against God and angered Him; if you feel you are a worm and less, and unworthy even of the name of man, quite apart from being unworthy of God; if you feel you are just nothing in view of the way you have left Him and turned your back upon Him, and ignored Him and flouted

Him; if you just cast yourself upon Him and His mercy, asking Him if in His infinite goodness and kindness He can possibly make something of you, all will be different. God never desired to see you as you now are. It was against His wish and His will that you have wandered away. It is all of your own doing. Tell Him so and tell Him further that what worries and distresses you most of all is not merely the misery you have brought upon yourself, but the fact that you have disobeyed Him and insulted Him and wronged Him.

Then having realized all this, act upon it. Leave the far country. You have stood up in the field of the swine and the husks by your mere action in visiting this chapel. But walk right out of that far country. Leave the swine and the husks. Turn your back on sin and give yourself to God. Feelings and desires and inclinations will avail you nothing.

Do it!

Make a break.

Get to God and get right with God!

Take your stand.

Commit yourself!

Venture on Him!

Trust Him!

How ridiculous it would have been for the prodigal to have thought of all he did and yet not do it! He would still have remained in the far country. But he did it. He acted upon his decision. He carried out his resolution. He went to his father and cast himself upon his mercy and compassion. You must do the same in the way I have already indicated.

An Amazing Discovery

If you but do so, you will find that in your case, as in the case of the prodigal, there will be a real, solid new beginning and new start. The impossible will happen and you will be amazed and astounded at what you will discover. I pass over the joy and the happiness and the thrill of it all tonight, in order that I may impress upon you the reality of the new start which the gospel gives. It is not something light and airy. It is no mere matter of sentiment or feelings. It is no mere drug or anesthetic which dulls our senses and therefore makes us dream of some bright realm. It is real and actual. In Jesus Christ a real genuine new start and new beginning are possible. And they are possible alone in Him!

The greatness of the father's love in the parable is seen not so much in his attitude as in what he did. Love is no mere vague sentiment or general disposition. Love is active. It is the mightiest activity in the world and it transforms everything. That is why here also, the love of God alone really can give us a new start and a new chance. The love of God does not merely talk about a new beginning, it makes a new beginning. "God so loved the world that He gave" (John 3:16). The father did things to the prodigal; God alone can do that to us and for us which can set us on our feet again. Let us observe how He does it. Oh! the wondrous love of God that really makes all things new and that alone can do so.

Observe how the father blots out the past. He goes to meet the son as if nothing had ever happened. He embraces him and kisses him as if he has always been most dutiful and exemplary in all his conduct! And

how quickly he commands the servants to strip off the rags and the tatters of the far country and remove from his son every trace and vestige of his evil past. He wipes out the past by all those actions, in a way that no one else could do. He alone could forgive really, he alone could wipe out what the boy had done against the family and against himself, and he did so. He strips off every trace of the past.

That is always the first thing that happens when a sinner turns to God in the way we have been describing. We go to Him and expect just as little as the prodigal who had expected to be made a servant. How infinitely does God transcend our highest expectations when He begins to deal with us. All we ask for is a kind of new beginning. God amazes and surprises us, in His very first action, by blotting out our past. And that, after all, is what we desire most of all. How can we be happy and be free in view of our past? Even if we no longer do a certain action, or commit a particular sin, there is a past, there is what we have done already. That is the problem.

Who can deliver us from our past? Who can erase from the book of our life what we have done already? There is but One! And He can! The world tries to persuade me that it does not matter, that I can turn my back upon it and forget it. But I cannot forget it; it keeps on returning. And it makes me miserable and wretched. I try everything, but still my past remains, a solid, awful, terrible fact. Can I never get free from it? Can I ever be rid of it?

There is only One who can strip it off my back. I only know that my rags and tatters have really gone when I see them on the Person of Jesus Christ the Son of God who wore them in my stead and became a curse in my place. The Father commanded Him to take my filthy rags off me, and He has done so. He bore my iniquity, He clothed and covered Himself with my sin. He has taken it away and has drowned it in the sea of God's forgetfulness. And when I see and believe that God in Christ has not only forgiven but also forgotten my past, who am I to try to look for it and to find it? My only consolation when I consider the past is that God has blotted it out. No one else could do so. But He has done so. It is the first essential step in a new beginning. The past must be erased, and in Christ and His atoning death, it is!

But in order to have a really new start, I require something further. It is not enough that every trace of my past be removed. I require something in the present. I desire to be clothed, I must be robed. I need confidence to start afresh and to face life and its people and its problems. Though the father met the boy and kissed him, that alone would not have given him confidence. He would have known that everyone was looking at the rags and at the mud. But the father does not stop at that. He clothes the boy with a dress that is worthy of a son, and he places a ring on his finger. He gives him the status of a son and the external proofs of that station. He announces to all that his son has returned, and so clothes him as to make him feel unashamed when he meets people. No one else could do that but the father. Others could have taken the boy in and have helped him, but no one could make him a son but the father. No one else could give him his position and provide him with the wherewithal.

It is precisely the same with us when we turn to God. He not only forgives and blots out the past, He makes us sons. He gives us new life and new power. He will so assure you of His love that you will be able to face others unashamed. He will clothe you with the robe of Christ's righteousness, He will not only tell you that He regards you as a child, but make you feel that you are one. As you look at yourself, you will not know yourself. You will look at your body and see this priceless robe; you will look at your feet and see them newly shod; you will look at your hand and see the ring and signet of God's love. And as you do so, you will feel that you can face the whole world without apology, yes, and face the devil also, and all the powers that fooled you in the past and ruined your life. Without this standing and confidence, a new start is

a mere figment of the imagination. The world only tries to clean the old suit and make it look respectable. God in Christ alone can clothe us with the new robe and really make us strong. Let the world try to point its finger and remind us of our past. Let it do its worse; we have but to look at the robe and the shoes and the ring, and all is well.

And if you require a clear proof of the actuality of all this, it is to be found in the fact that even the world has to acknowledge that it is true. Listen to the servant speaking to the elder brother. What does he say? Is it, "A strange-looking man in rags and tatters has come from somewhere?" No! "Thy brother is come" (15:27). How did he know he was the brother? Ah! he had seen the father's actions and had heard the father's words. He would never have recognized the son, but the father did, even while he was yet a long way off. The father knew!

And God knows you. When you go to Him and allow Him to clothe you, everyone will get to know it. Even the elder brother knew it. It was the last thing he wanted to know, but the conclusion to be drawn from the singing and the noise of jubilation and happiness was unavoidable. He is too mean to say "my brother," but he, even he, has to say "this thy son." I do not promise that everyone will like you and speak well of you if you give yourself to God in Christ. Many will certainly hate you and persecute you and try to laugh at you and do many things to you, but, in doing so, they will actually be testifying that they also have seen that you are a new man and that you have been made anew and have been given a new start.

Come!

Here is an opportunity for a real new beginning. It is the only way. God Himself has made it possible by sending His only begotten Son into this world, to live and die and rise again. It matters not at all what you have been, nor what you are like at the moment. You have but to come to God confessing your sin against Him, casting yourself upon His mercy in Jesus Christ, acknowledging that He alone can save and keep, and you will find that

The past shall be forgotten,

A present joy be given,

A future grace be promised,

A glorious crown in heaven.

Come! Amen.

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