

The Drama of Life in Three Acts

by R.A. Torrey

The sermon 'The Drama of Life in Three Acts' by R.A. Torrey explains the nature of sin, its growth, and the remedy for sin, emphasizing God's love and forgiveness towards the sinner.

Scripture: Luke 15:11

Topics: "The Prodigal Son", "Sin and Redemption"

Description

R.A. Torrey presents 'The Drama of Life in Three Acts,' illustrating the journey of a wayward son as a metaphor for humanity's relationship with God. The first act, Wandering, depicts the nature of sin as the son seeks independence from his father, representing mankind's desire to live apart from God. The second act, Desolation, reveals the consequences of sin, including temporary pleasure followed by deep want and degradation. In the final act, The Wanderer's Return, the son realizes his mistakes and resolves to return home, symbolizing repentance and God's readiness to forgive and embrace the sinner. Torrey emphasizes that God, like the father in the parable, eagerly awaits the return of those who have strayed.

Transcript

"A certain man had two sons." -- Luke xv. 11.

My subject to-night is the Drama of Life in Three Acts. The Lord Jesus Christ is the author of the Drama, and it surpasses anything that was ever put on the stage in conciseness, in point, in height and depth, and full-ness; and beauty of meaning, in pathos and in power. The Dramatic Personae of the drama are four-God, two men and the Devil. There are three acts in the drama: the First Act, Wandering; the second Act, Desolation; and the Third Act, The Wanderer's Return. There is a Fourth Act, but with that we have nothing to do to-night.

1. ACT I -- WANDERING; OR THE NATURE OF SIN

In the first act there are two scenes:

Scene 1. -- A beautiful home, a spacious mansion, with everything to meet every desire of the hearts of its occupants. An aged father, whose countenance is full of nobility, and wisdom, and kindness, a remarkable, blending of strength and tenderness. He is in earnest conversation with the younger of his two sons. This younger son is tired of the restraints of home. He has heard of the gaiety in a distant country, and he longs to break the trammels of his father's guardian care, and to see the sights and enjoy the

pleasures of this new land. And he cries impatiently, "Father, give me the portion of thy goods that, falleth to me." A look of inexpressible pain passes over the gentle face of the aged father, but he grants the sons request.

Scene 2. -- A leave-taking, a home-leaving. The younger son has gathered all his property together, got it into as portable a form as possible, and is taking his journey to the far country. It is a beautiful spring morning, the birds are singing sweetly, the air is fragrant with the perfume of spring flowers, the young man's voice is full of gladness and good cheer and with light and tripping step he trends his way down the avenue from the old home, little thinking of the father who watches him with moist eyes and lonely heart as he leaves the front gate and goes out into a false and evil world.

In these two scenes we have a picture of the nature, beginnings and growth of sin. The father in the drama is God; the son, man wandering from God. The son wished to have his own way; he was tired of the restraints of his father's control. He desired to get away from his father that he might do as he pleased. That is where sin begins—in a desire to be independent of God, in a desire to have our own way, in a desire to do as we please. The essence of sin is in a desire to do what we please, rather than be constantly looking to God and asking Him what pleases Him. Is there any man or woman here to-night who wishes to do as they please? They have the beginnings of sin in their heart. Now, what you please to do may be upright, may be moral, may be very refined, but the desire to do your own will is the heart and essence and substance of sin. There are different classes of sinners and different forms of sin. There is sin that is coarse, and there is

sin that is refined. There is sin that is low and vulgar, and there is sin that is genteel and elegant. But all sin is alike in essence. It is man seeking to be independent of God, man seeking to have his own way, that is where sin begins, that is the very essence of sin.

The second scene represents to us the growth of sin. The son did not leave home at once. His heart was in the far country already, but he still stayed at home. But not very long. Not many days after his feet followed where his heart had already gone. That is the story of sin in every instance. When a man starts out in the path of sin, starts out to have his own way, he does not give up all communion with God at once. He still goes to church occasionally, reads his Bible occasionally, prays now and then, but less and less as the days go by, until at last he begins to wonder whether there is any God, begins to listen to voices that say there is no God, and last of all, blatantly cries, "No God, no divine Christ, no inspired Bible, no God!"

How far have you got on that path of sin? Are you just starting out? Are you seeking your own pleasure, but still keeping up some form of communion with God, still attending the House of God now and then, opening the Bible now and then, praying now and then, but less and less; or have you got farther down that road, down where you are never found in the House of God, never read your Bible, never go to God in prayer? Or have you got away off into the far country, where you say, "There is no God, the Bible is not the Word of God, Jesus Christ is not the Son of God?" How far have you got down the path of sin?

Will you notice before we leave this Act that the father granted the younger son's request? He knew how the boy would use the money, but he also knew that the only way for him to learn wisdom was in the bitter school of experience. That is precisely the way that God deals with us. If a man desires to live independently of God, God lets him do it. God does not force a man into a life of communion with Himself, and conscious dependence on Himself; He gives us our choice and gives us our powers to make a living, and if we wish to live without communion with Him, He allows us to do it. If we can only learn the folly of

living away from God by bitter experience, God lets us have the experience.

2. ACT II -- DESOLATION; OR, THE FRUITS OF SIN.

Scene 1. -- It is a gay one. The young man has reached the far country, and life is one constant round of pleasure balls, wine suppers, races, card parties, theatres, operas, all kinds of amusements, innocent and sinful, are the order of the day. Every day is a day of parties and every night a night of dissipation, and the young fellow is having a right royal time. Oftentimes he looks back on the quiet home life. Ah! how humdrum it was; how he pities his elder brother staying home there in all that dull life!

Scene 2. -- The scene shifts. He is still in the city, but the boom has burst; hard times have come, men are out of work, famine stalks the street. On every corner there are little groups of men in ragged clothes, with pinched faces, with starvation looking out of their eyes, standing around trying to earn a chance penny by, odd jobs, and our friend is among the company. "There arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want."

Scene 3. -- A rural scene, but not a pleasant one. A great pasture, but not a blade of grass. In the prolonged drought every spear of grass has withered. In the midst of the field stands a lonely carob tree, from which hang the long pods covered with dust; a herd of gaunt, hungry swine are nosing about in the sand, looking for stray carob beans. Our friend stands underneath the tree looking eagerly up at the carob beans, for "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat." At last, driven by hunger, but at the same time weakened by it, he wearily climbs the tree, and shakes it until the pods fall from its branches, but the hogs have devoured them before he can reach the ground. Again and again he climbs the tree, but with the same result, and at last he falls upon the ground in despair, starving, "and no man gave unto him." In these scenes of the parable, we gave a picture of the fruits of sin. The first fruit of sin is pleasure; the young man has a good time at first. There are those who tell us that there is no pleasure in sin, but I will not tell you that; first, because you would not believe me if I did. You have tried sin and found pleasure in it. I will not tell you that there is no pleasure in sin, because I know it is not true. I tried sin and found pleasure in it. I will not tell you there is no pleasure in sin, because the Bible does not say so. It is true that the Bible says "there is no peace for the wicked," and you know that is true, or, if you don't know it now, you will before very long. But the Bible does not say that there is no pleasure in sin. On the contrary, the Bible speaks in Hebrews xi. of "the pleasures of sin." Of course it adds that they are only "for a season," very short lived. There is pleasure in sin. Some one has said, I think it was Mark Guy Pearse, that the devil is not such a fool as to go fishing without bait. The pleasures of sin are the devil's bait. But mind you, the devil's bait always has a hook in it. He is dangling his bait before some of you here tonight. "Oh," he says, "don't become a Christian; you will have to give up this; the ball-room, look at this; the theatre, look at this; the card-party and its pleasures, look at this." And to-night, if you will snatch the devil's bait, the first you know you will have the devil's hook in your gills, and you will be on the bottom of the devil's boat, beneath a pitiless sun, floating out over the sea of a hopeless eternity.

The second fruit of sin is want. "He began to be in want." That is always the second result of sin-want, famine, starvation. Oftentimes they come in a very literal form. How many men there are in London to-night without a decent coat to their backs, without a meal in their stomachs, without a place to lay their heads, who once had plenty. A friend of mine pointed out to me a man one night in Chicago. He said, "Do you see that poor fellow there all curled up near the store, with his uncombed hair and ragged clothes? That man used to be a Congressman of this district." Fast times followed by hard times. But it does not always come that way. There is many a man living in sin who has plenty of money, plenty to eat, plenty to

drink, plenty to put on, plenty of all material things; nevertheless, want comes. There is other famine besides temporal famine. There is other starvation besides physical starvation. A man has a soul as well as a belly, though a good many men in London live as if they did not believe it; but it is a fact. The human soul is so large, so vast, so glorious that God only can fill it, and away from God there is starvation. Augustine was right when he said, "Thou, O Lord, hast made us for thyself, and our soul is never satisfied until it resteth in thyself." Away from God there is barrenness, away from God is an aching void, away from God is the bottomless abyss of insatiable desire; away from God is woe, woe, woe! Look at that young fellow as he sits there in his tatters and with uncombed hair, the hunger of his stomach looking out of his half-crazy eyes, and see in that wretched prodigal a picture of your soul, a picture of every soul in this hall to-night that is away from God.

How well I remember a day and a night in my own life. I had started out one afternoon to have an afternoon and night of pleasure. With a little company of chosen companions I was in a hall that had been fitted up at great cost for pleasure. For a few moments I had left my gay companions, and I stood in the distance leaning against a pillar and looking at them yonder. And oh, there was such a cry, such an aching void, such a mysterious despair in my heart, that I leaned up against the pillar of that magnificent hall and I groaned in the agony of my spirit. I was starving. What do you think I did? I shook it all off and went right back to spend the afternoon and night as I had started out to spend it. What a fool I was!

The third fruit of sin is degradation and slavery. "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 that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him." Jesus was to Jews, and if 'there is any position low and degrading in the sight of a Jew it is that of a swine-herd. Christ meant this, that you and I have our choice between being God's sons and hog-tenders to the devil. That is the choice open to every man here to-night. That young man might have been a son in his father's home, in glad, ennobling and well-requited service, but instead of that he is hog-tender to a stranger. It is open to you to be a child of God in full and joyous surrender to His will, in glad and ennobling and well-requited service, or to be hog-tender to the devil. Men say, "I will not be a Christian. I want my own way." You cannot have it; no man has his own way- It is either God's way or the devil's. You cannot have your own way-unless you make God's way your own. Young man, which will you choose to-night? To be a child of God., or to be a swine-herd for Satan?

3. Act III -- THE WANDERER'S RETURN; OR, THE REMEDY FOR SIN.

We come now to the third and last act of the drama. There are two scenes. The first scene is the same lonely field. The young man sits beneath the carob tree with his face in his hands and in despair. He begins to think. Visions of the old home come before him. He sees his noble father; he sees the well-laden table; he sees the well-fed servants, and bitterly he cries, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I (his son) perish with hunger!" and his face sinks deeper into his hands. Then he lifts his head with the light of a new hope in his eyes, and he cries, "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." And he arose and came to his Father. This is God's picture of the remedy for sin. Notice what it is. In the first place he began to think-that is where salvation begins in thinking. People say that Christianity is blind faith; not a bit of it. Christianity is a rational faith that comes from honest, candid, close thought. He began to think. Men often say to me, "I am not a Christian, because I think for myself." My dear friend, you are not a Christian because you don't think for yourself. You don't think, and you know you don't. For every man who is not a Christian because he thinks for himself, I will show you a hundred who are not Christians because they don't and won't think for

themselves. What is the trouble with you who are out of Christ? The simple, trouble is that you won't think. You are bound not to think. You deliberately refuse to read every book that would make you think. You go down to hear some infidel lectures because you think that will prevent you thinking, because they stuff you with irrational nonsense. At a meeting like this you will go out when the preaching becomes too pointed and you are compelled to think; some of you would do it now if you dared. If I could get you men and women who are out of Christ to think for thirty consecutive minutes, I would get you saved. The trouble is you are bound not to think. A stubborn refusal to think is sending tens of thousands of the men of Great Britain down to perdition.

He thought about the comparative lots of his father's servants and of himself in this far country. The comparative position of a child, or even a servant, of God and a servant of the devil; that is the thing to think about. I wish I could get a good and faithful servant of Christ and a faithful servant of the devil to stand together on this platform to-night and just let you look at the two. Pick out the best servant of the devil you know in London, and then pick out the most faithful and devoted servant of Jesus Christ that you know; then make a call on them the same day, and study their faces. If this does not make a Christian of you, it is because you are not willing to give up sin. Compare the lot of the child of God and that of the servant of the devil.

But, friends, he did not stop with thinking; his thought brightened into resolution. He said, "I will arise and go." It is not enough to think, you must resolve; there are people here to-night who have thought of this question often and who know just as well as I do that they ought to be Christians, but they never come to the point of resolution. In my first pastorate there was one of our leading men in business and politics whom I know very well. I said to him, "John, you ought to be a Christian." "I know it" he replied. "I would give everything in the world if I were a Christian. I know you have got the right of it, and the best of it, and I would like to be a Christian!" "Then," I said, "John, give me your hand on it, and take Jesus Christ right now." But he never would come to the point of resolution. Don't only think; resolve! What are you to resolve? "I will arise and go to the Father." That is the thing; come to God, to your Father. Come right to Him.

But notice how to come; come with a confession, and say, "I have sinned." That is the only way a sinner can come to God-with a confession. God is willing to receive the vilest sinner on earth that will come with a confession on his lips.

The last step is "He arose and came to his Father." He turned his back on husks and hogs and hunger and turned his face towards home. Now we come to the last scene. The boy is nearing home. I don't know what his thoughts may have been by the way. He may have had doubts and fears., he may have wondered how he would be received, he may even have thought, "I wish I could fix myself up better before going home." But he had sense enough to come just as he was, and he kept trudging right along on his journey, and now he is within a few miles of home. Away off - yonder on the hilltop, as the sun was setting, stands a man, an old man, in the last rays of the setting sun, peering off into the west. He has often been there before; it is the father looking out into the west, for the home-coming of the boy that never came. The loving father is there again, for love never wearies, looking out into the west Away down yonder towards the horizon he sees a speck. Can it be the boy? It grows larger and larger; it assumes the proportions and form of a man, but not at all the boy who left his home; no longer is it that rotund form, no longer is there the bright glow of youth in his face, no longer is there the light, tripping step. It is the figure of a man prematurely old, with sunken cheeks and emaciated form, clothed in rags and sore-footed limping slowly along the road. But those old eyes, though dim with age, are sharp with love. Hear that cry, "My son, my

son!" The aged feet forget their feebleness- The old man runs and falls on the neck of him and kisses him. The son begins to stammer out his confession: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But the father won't hear another word. He cries: "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, a ring on his hand and robes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry for this my son was dead and is alive again: he was lost and is found." Of what is this a picture? God-God's attitude towards the sinner. Although the son had forgotten the father, the father had not forgotten the son. For many years you have forgotten God, but God has never forgotten you. You have not thought of God for many a long day, but there has not been a day in which God has not thought of you, waiting to see some sign of your home-coming. If you turn your back on your sin to-night, if you turn back on husks, hogs and hunger, turn you face towards God; while you are still a great way off, God will run to meet you; and there will be the best robe of God's own righteousness in Christ to put on you, a ring for your finger, a pledge of your sonship; a kiss of reconciliation for your cheek, shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of Peace for your feet, and the fatted calf, typical of the great feast of joy and gladness in Jesus Christ. Men and women, come home to-night.

I heard years ago a story which I have never forgotten. A girl had gone astray and had left her home the great city. For some time she had continued to write to her mother, but after a while her letters became less frequent and at last they ceased altogether. The mother suspected the worst, and came up to the city to search for the lost girl. She went to a gentleman who worked in the lower parts of the city and asked him, "Can you get my daughter for me?" "Well,," he replied, "I think I can, but you will have to do just what I tell you." "I will do anything to get my daughter," she replied. "Then," said the missionary, "go to a photographer and have your picture taken; have it taken large size, and have a hundred of them, and bring them to me." After a while the mother came, bringing the hundred photographs. "Now," he said, 'sit down and write underneath each photograph just these two words, 'Come home,' " and the mother sat down and wrote. "Now," said the missionary, "may I take these photographs down into the low parts of the city and put them up in the saloons and places of infamy?" It was a hard thing to ask of a pure woman, that her picture should be put up to the gaze of the outcast and the vile. But the mother's love said "Yes"- anything to win the girl. The man took them and put them up in a hundred dens of infamy. Then he said to the mother, "Now go right home and wait." A few nights after, a group of revelers came into one of the places where the mother's picture hung among the group was the lost daughter; who, looking across the saloon, saw that picture on the wall. It looked familiar. Stepping over to it, she saw in her mother's handwriting the two words, "Come home." She knew what it meant; it broke her heart; she fled from the saloon and took the first train for home, and in a few hours she was wrapped in her mother's arms.

That is what God has done in this fifteenth chapter of Luke. He has sent down a picture of Himself, picture of His heart of love, of His love for you and me, and underneath it God has written, as it were in His own handwriting, these two words, "Come home."

Will you come to-night?

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