

UP FROM SIN

The Fall and Rise of a Prodigal
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by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE REWARD OF RIGHT DOING

“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.” (Luke 15:24).

It is my purpose now to follow our young man home, and show his gracious reception by a loving, forgiving father. We left him starting – that was more than half the battle. Getting the consent of our minds is the first step, but unless we start, the consent amounts to no purpose.

He is on his way home; it is a lonesome journey – an entirely new route. How different from the one he traveled only a short while ago – perhaps only a few years, when he went out from the old home, from loved ones and friends!

That morning when he turned his eyes world-ward, it was a bright day. What a grand panorama before him! Beautiful landscapes, towering mountain peaks, with lovely cascades wreathed in perpetual blooming flowers; broad, sweeping plains, waving in golden grain, only awaiting the harvester; laughing streams and streamlets, along whose banks were ever-fragrant flowers. How bright the prospects! How envied his start!

But things have wonderfully changed, even in so short a time. Those tall peaks of hope are now reeking, belching volcanoes, pouring their red-hot lava of death and ruin upon him in his every step. Those waving fields of grain are now great wildernesses of thorns and thistles, while those laughing streams and streamlets are now become great stagnant ponds, teeming with the poisonous microcosms of blasted hopes and lost opportunities. Oh, how sad! Like Milton in *Samson Agonistes*, when the messenger enters in hot haste to relate the catastrophe at Gaza –

“Which way to go or wither fly
The sight of this so horrid spectacle,
Which erst my eyes beheld and
Still behold; for dire imaginations
Still pursue me.”

Yes, like a poor debauchee, just coming out of a spell of delirium, in his semi-consciousness, the ghosts of hell continue to haunt him by flouncing into his face the scroll of a misspent and sinful past, so this young prodigal now tramps the lonesome path with a heavy heart and a smiting conscience. Nothing to eat; nothing to wear; no friends – alone he comes plodding home to his father.

Young men, this ought to be a warning. It is the fruit of sin. Oh, stop now, before the evil days come nigh.

Second – The next place we find him is at home. He is standing on the same soil upon which he once played. Things here have changed, too, since he left. It is always true that things undergo seemingly a much more rapid change when we are away.

A VISIT TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOME

I remember some years ago I visited my grandmother after being away for several years. I had looked forward to the trip with great pleasure. The day arrived. I started from the city of Raleigh, N. C. It was a beautiful afternoon, and I had a swift horse. But the distance was so long – it seemed as if I never would get there. Finally, I was in the neighborhood, and ventured to ask the way, for there were new houses and new roads, and I was somewhat lost. Soon, however, I was there. Oh, what a change! The house was so much dilapidated. The flowers were all dead. Many of the beautiful white oaks in the large grove had been cut down. What a change. What a change! But I had not realized the change to its fullest extent until I saw dear old grandma, her form all bent, her eyes dim, her voice trembling with the use of eighty-nine years. Surely I realized that life is full of changes – too numerous to be told. Today we are babies, tomorrow we are old.

So we can imagine that our young man, as he stood and viewed the surroundings, saw many sad changes. The grounds, the trees, the home, the shrubbery, all changed. It does not look like home. And, besides, father has changed. His hair is gray, partially due to his boy's misconduct. Mother may be gone, and her vacant chair, empty slippers and absent voice strike dismay to his already sad heart.

But with all, it is a glad day, for he is at home at last. All fears are gone. Father saw him, and ran and met him. I don't know how he knew him. There might have been something in his walk which so resembled the child of a few years ago, or perhaps, while he was a great way off, he began to cry, or to sing, and the father heard him and recognized him as his darling boy.

“O, YOU RASCAL, YOU CAN'T FOOL YOUR OLD GRANDMAMMY.”

There is something strange about the recognition of parents of their children. On that same trip when I went to visit my old grandmother, I was convinced of this. I thought I would fool her. So, driving up to the gate, I said, “Hello!” The dogs began to bark. Again, “Hello!” said I. Just then, an old woman came to the door.

Said I, “Does Mrs. Franks live here?”

I thought I had completely changed my voice; but about that time I heard her dear old voice from within say:

“O, you rascal, you can’t fool your poor old grandmammy. Get down off that buggy!”

And out she came. It didn’t take me long before I was on the ground. “God bless you, Lennie, my dear boy!” and then I hardly know what happened. It was a foretaste of what I shall again realize when I drive up to her mansion in heaven, and she comes to meet me.

Oh, the father’s glad heart that day when the boy came home! Boys, don’t stay away from home too long. You will regret it some day. There are those there who love you. They would die for you. They are thinking about you all the time. Go home as often as you can consistently with your duties, and if you can’t go as often as you would like, write to mother and father often. Cheer their dear old hearts by letting them know you still love and remember them fondly.

“IT CAME FROM WHERE MOTHER SAT.”

Pardon me for giving you a little incident which was given me by a friend. I believe it was told him by the Rev. Dr. P. S. Henson, of Chicago. Dr. Henson was on his way to preach a commencement sermon at Wake Forest College, in North Carolina. At the town of Weldon he found an old man sitting on a seat opposite him. He was a rough-looking specimen of a man; evidently showing that he had lived a tough life. He seemed to be in great distress.

“Can I be of any comfort to you, my friend?” asked the doctor.

“No, no,” said he, in a gruff manner.

Several times he offered help, but he was refused, the old man saying: “Nobody cares for me.” Dr. Henson made his trip, and was returning. At a little station on the way, this same old man came aboard the cars. He was more troubled than before. The doctor spoke to him again, and this time he seemed glad of an opportunity to talk.

Said he, “Mister, I’m all broken up. Oh, I’m ruined. You see, I’m old now – I’m over seventy. When I was a boy, I ran away from home. I had a good mother. At first, I felt lonesome, and often thought about her, but as time passed I ceased to think of her. I never wrote to her. She did not know where I was. Some time ago I began to think of her. I felt like I must see her, but I did not expect she was living. The thought continued to stay with me. I resolved to come from my Western home back to North Carolina to see if I could find her. I went to the neighborhood and asked for her, but nobody knew anything about the family. Finally, I found an old man who remembered her, but could not tell me where she was buried. But I remembered the old church where she always carried me. I went over and found it, but it was gone to nothing. I went in. It had a brick floor. I found the place where she always sat. There were no bricks on which her feet rested. I got down there and cried, mister – cried like a child. Oh, to have her back!

And now, friend, you see this bundle? Well, I’m carrying it home. This brick you see is worn; her feet did that. I’m going to take it home, and when I die I want my head to rest on this brick.”

This was a sad story. We feel sorry for the old man as we read it. Young men, don’t, I beg you, neglect these dear old souls. Serve them more and more as the days go by. How tender the thought of mother when she is gone!

“They tell me of an angel’s form
That watched me while I slept,
And of a soft and gentle hand
That wiped the tears I wept.

“And that same hand that held my own
when I began to walk –
The joy that sparkled in her eyes
When first I tried to talk.

“They say the mother’s heart is pleased
When infant charms expand –
I wonder if she thinks of me,
In that bright and happy land.

“I know she is in heaven now,
That holy place of rest,
For she was always good to me –
The good alone are blest.

“And I have got some little books,
She taught me how to spell,
The chiding or the kiss she gave,
I still remember well.

“And then she used to kneel with me,
And taught me how to pray,
And raise my little hands t’wards heaven
And tell me what to say.

“O! Mother, mother, in my heart
Thy image still shall be,
And I will hope in heaven at last,
That I may meet with thee.”

Third – But, young men, the prodigal’s reception by his father has a deeper and a richer meaning than the domestic relation. It does not simply mean to be applied to prodigality in the various walks of life, but primarily it is intended to show a sinner’s wandering from God, the conditions of his return and the graciousness of our Father’s reception.

1. We see in the young man himself an unbeliever. Everyone failing to accept the Lord Jesus is a prodigal.
2. We have in his fast life the nature of sin to lead us on and on to ruin, promising everything and giving nothing.
3. We have in his want the utter insufficiency of a life of sinful pleasure to satisfy.
4. In his coming home and reception, we have the nature of God to forgive.

Oh, dear, unbelieving souls, come home to your loving, heavenly Father! Why longer stay in sin? Come home now!

HOW COME?

Do you ask how come? Why, like the prodigal, “Arise.” Start out. Turn around. Jesus stands to receive you.

Some years ago I heard a celebrated revivalist explain repentance and faith. I was standing in the door, for I could not get a seat. All at once the preacher jumped off the platform and came down the aisle, saying, “I’m going to hell! I’m going to hell!”

Said I to myself, I believe it. About that time, he wheeled on his heels, and started back, saying, “I’m going to heaven! I’m going to heaven!”

Then, stepping on the platform, said he, “That’s what I mean by repentance and faith. A while ago you were going to in unbelief and sin; you were going to hell. You turned around, looked to God, started toward Him – that’s repentance and faith together.”

So I call you to turn around now; turn to God. There is salvation for everyone who will only accept it.

Dr. Newman Hall relates this story, which I give in conclusion, praying God to bless it to your salvation:

Some years ago a tall chimney had been completed, and the scaffolding was being moved. One man remained on top to superintend the process. A rope should have been left for him to descend by. His wife was at home washing, when her little boy burst in with:

“Mother, mother, they’ve forgotten the rope, and he’s going to throw himself down!”

She paused; her lips moved in agony of prayer, and she rushed forth. A crowd was looking up at the poor man, who was moving around the narrow cornice, terrified and bewildered; he seemed as if any moment he might fall or throw himself down in despair. His wife from below cried out:

“Take off your stockings, unravel the worsted!”

He did so.

“Now tie the end to a bit of mortar, and lower gently.”

Down came the thread and a bit of mortar, swinging backwards and forwards. Lower and lower it descended, eagerly watched by many eyes; it was now within reach, and was gently seized by one of the crowd. They fastened some twine to the thread. “Now pull up.” The man got hold of the twine. A rope was now fastened on. “Pull away again.” He at length seized the rope and made it secure. There was a few moments of suspense, then amidst the shouts of the people he threw himself into the arms of his wife, sobbing:

“Thou’st saved me, Mary!”

The worsted thread was not despised; it drew after it the twine, the rope, the rescue!

Ah, my friend, thou may’st be sunk very low down in sin and woe, but there is a thread of divine love that comes from the throne of heaven and touches even thee. Seize the thread. It may seem small, but it is golden. Improve what you have, however little, and then more shall be given. That thin thread of love, if you will not neglect it, shall lift even you up to God and glory. **“Who hath despised the day of small things.”**

The father put the best robe upon him, shoes upon his feet and made merry with the entire household. So God, your Father, will clothe you in the robe of Christ’s righteousness, and make glad the City of God. Come home, young man! Come home!

“Let me conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream.
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.
This He gives you.
‘Tis the Spirit’s rising beam.

“Agonizing in the garden,
Lo! Your Maker prostrate lies.
On the bloody tree behold Him.
Hear Him cry before He dies
‘**It is finished.**’
Sinners, will this not suffice?

“Lo! The incarnate God, ascended,
Pleads the merit of his blood.
Venture on Him venture wholly;
Let no other trusts intrude:
None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good.”

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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