

UP FROM SIN

The Fall and Rise of a Prodigal
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by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

MAKING MOST OF TIME

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15, 16).

It is astonishing what one can do when once he has made up his mind to do his best.

Not long after I entered the ministry, I went to a certain town to hold a series of meetings. It was one of these good old Southern towns, the inhabitants of which fed their souls upon the glory of departed days. They had never known what it was to be spiritually warm.

The first night I was there I preached to a great audience. It was in my early ministry, when I made many propositions.

The first one I made that night was for any one to stand who wanted prayers offered for their friends. As soon as I made it a little boy stood looking me square in the face. I said, “God bless you, little man,” and he sat down. I then asked any one who wanted the prayers of God’s people to rise. That boy got out in the aisle again and looked me in the face, and again I said, “God bless you.” I asked if there was anybody present who was willing to accept Jesus. That boy stood up again and looked me in the face, and again I said, “God bless you.” Nobody else stood up that night, and I began to think I had struck about the hardest and coldest crowd I had ever run up against.

The next night I preached as hard as I knew how to sinners, and when I finished, I asked anybody who wanted to be prayed for to stand up. That same little rascal popped out into the aisle as he had done the night before, and stood looking at me till I saw him and said, “God bless you.” I thought I’d vary the thing a little, so I asked if anybody present was willing to come forward and give me his hand as an indication that he would accept Jesus. That same boy came shuffling out of his seat, straight down the aisle, and gave me his hand. I saw smiles on the faces of some in the congregation. Nobody but that boy showed any interest, and I went off somewhat disheartened.

The third night I preached, and when I asked all who wanted prayer to rise, that boy popped out in the aisle. The people had begun to regard it as a joke, and they nudged each other with their elbows, while a broad smile flared from one side of the house to the other.

When I asked anybody who was willing to accept Jesus to come and give me their hand, that boy came, and the congregation smiled broader than before, and some actually tittered.

After the meeting the deacons came to me and told me that the boy must be stopped, as he was a half-idiot, and was throwing a damper on the meeting. I said:

“Stop nothing! How are you going to throw a damper on an ice-house?”

For the whole of that week the boy was the only person in the house who showed any interest in the meeting. Then he wanted to join the church. The pastor was absent, and I was to open the doors of the church. The deacons came to me and said I must not receive that boy, as he didn't have sense enough to join the church. I said:

“Look here, brethren, I won't take this responsibility on my hands. I'm going to put that boy on you, and if you choose to reject him, his blood be upon your heads.”

At the conclusion of the morning service, I invited all who desired to unite with the church to come forward. That boy came. I asked him if he had accepted Christ as his personal Saviour. That's all I ever ask. He said he had.

“Brethren,” said I, “you hear what this boy has to say. What will you do with him?”

An ominous silence fell on the congregation. After a time, from way back by the door I heard a muffled and rather surly “I move he be received.” Another painful silence followed, and then from the middle of the church I heard a muffled “I second the motion.”

When I put the motion, about half a dozen members voted “aye” in a tone so low that it seemed as if they were scared. I gave the boy the right hand of Christian welcome awaiting baptism, and then dismissed the congregation.

The next day the boy went out to see his old grandfather, a man whose whitened head was blossoming for the grave, and whose feet were taking hold upon the sands of eternity.

“Grandfather,” said he, “won't you go to church with me to-night and hear that preacher?”

We always feel kindly toward those who are afflicted, you know, and are willing to please them; so the old man agreed to go.

That night I saw the boy and the old man sitting away back near the door. When the sermon was finished, one of the members of the church and said:

“I have a request to make. He have with us to-night Mr. Blank, one of our oldest and most respected citizens, but he is out of Christ. I want special prayer offered for this my special friend.

With that he laid his hand upon the head of the old man, down whose furrowed cheeks the tears were streaming. The next night I saw the old man sitting about halfway down the aisle. When all who wanted to accept Jesus were invited to come forward and give me their hand, I saw the half-idiot boy coming down the aisle leading the old man by the hand.

Sure “**a little child shall lead them.**”

That little boy’s father kept a saloon. The following day the child went there, and climbing up over the high counter, he peeped down upon his father and said:

“Papa, won’t you go to church with me to-night to hear that preacher?”

“You get out of here, child; go out of here,” said the father: “don’t you know you mustn’t come in here?”

Strange, strange, how fathers will keep places into which their children cannot go.

“But, papa,” continued the boy, “won’t you go to church with me to-night?”

“Yes, I’ll go, but you get out of here.”

That night the man came with the half-idiot boy, and sat about where the old man had sat the night before. When I asked all who would accept Christ to come forward, he walked down the aisle and gave me his hand. He asked if he could make a statement, and when I said “yes,” he faced the congregation and said:

“My friends, you all know me, and I want to say that so long as I live I will never sell another drop of whisky, for I have given my heart to God to-night, and from this day forward I propose to serve Him.”

The meeting warmed up at last, the town was set on fire for God, every saloon-keeper was converted and every saloon in town was closed. The influence spread, and a saloon seven miles in the country was closed, and the keeper was converted to God.

At the close of the mission I sat on the front seat and saw the pastor lead three generations into the baptismal waters, the old man in front, his son behind him, and last in line the little half-idiot boy. The only mistake that was made, to my mind, was that the boy who had led the others to Christ should not have been first in the line.

Where is that boy now? He has grown much brighter within the last few years, and is now going to school. He says he wants to be and will be a missionary. Oh, my friends, my heart thrills within me to think that, off yonder in some dark continent, there are heathen souls who are waiting for the sound of the voice of that boy to proclaim to them the glad things of salvation and to send a stream of light into their benighted lives!

What a lesson for us today! Let us learn it. Persistent, self-surrender, *ever doing the best we can*, under the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit, is a never-failing way that leads to victory.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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