

LEST YE FAINT

by

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CHAPTER TWO

BEHIND THE SCENE IN THE PRODIGAL'S LIFE

“I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18).

THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON IS One of the most familiar of all the parables. The characters step out on the stage of divine Revelation in a sprightly manner, act their several parts with a never-to-be-forgotten naturalness and then leave themselves on the screen of our memories as though the curtain had never fallen upon the scene. It is more than a narrative; it is a dramatized lesson of deep spiritual import for youth and adulthood alike. There are many approaches to the text and many applications for the message.

Among the numerous exegetical highlights, we observe the impatience of the son, the impartiality of the father, the impiety of the wanderer, the impression of home, the imperishability of paternal love, the imprudence of the brother and the importance of the return. Then, focusing the spotlight more definitely upon the prodigal himself, our attention is drawn to his demand, his departure, his downfall, his desperation, his desecration, his desire and his decision. A closer examination reveals some telling facts.

- His vision was faulty because his outlook was bad;
- His judgment was overpowered because the wrong decision was made;
- His planning was poor because he spent all without profitable investment;
- His resourcefulness was low because he could not command much in the way of employment;
- His standing was lost because he joined himself with foreigners;
- His plight was desperate because he was in want;
- His pride was deflated because he tended the swine;
- His memory was good because he thought of home;
- His repentance was real because he returned humbly.

Going behind the scene in the life of this younger son, several pertinent facts are discoverable.

First, the rampage of an urge;
Second, the road of the wayward;
Third, the remorse of the wanderer;
Fourth, the return of the penitent.

The Rampage of an Urge

THE URGE WAS CAUSED BY AN ALLUREMENT

The glitter of false values has a dimming effect upon the spiritual vision, and if the germ of discontent has found lodgment in one's heart, ever so small a diverting attraction may seem like a hearty welcome to the out-reaching desires. Foreign pastures always seem greener to dissatisfied emotions. The reports of the **"far country"** had been incubating in this young son's mind for some time. It was the answer to his Utopian dream. There was wealth; there was opportunity; there was assured success, so he thought. If his older brother wanted to remain at home, that was his affair, but he, himself, would launch out. His daily tasks grew dull and irksome; his home became unattractive; his father seemed too rigid, too exacting; his whole emotional life was fast becoming unsettled. Some of his friends had set out for the **"far country"**. They had courage to make the break. They had been famously successful in their venture. He would have courage, too. He would also make good. The urge was constantly present.

THE URGE WAS ENCOURAGED BY INSISTENCE

As a man **"thinketh in his heart, so is he"** (Proverbs 23:7).

It was evident that this young man's interests were not in his home and in his father's vineyards. He was careless in his actions and irritable in his attitudes. Both the mother and father spent sleepless nights in parental consultation and prayer supplication regarding him. No matter how often or how much his parents sought to dissuade him, it was of no avail. He insisted that the die was cast. His reasons for going were not well founded, and his people knew this, but he insisted.

This case finds its analogy in the spiritual realm. Indeed, that is why the Saviour advanced the parable, but how true to experience is the point at hand. One becomes dissatisfied with the things of Christ. The discontent grows.

The church is not what it ought to be, such an one reasons;

- The people are no longer friendly;
- The preacher is inconsiderate;
- The doctrinal position of the church is too rigid;
- The viewpoint is too narrow.

But the **"far country"** (it has everything to supply happiness, prestige and opportunity.

The pastor and the elders struggle to overcome these objections, but to no avail. The insistence of the urge to explore the recommendations of others, contrary to the Word of Truth, becomes overpowering and self-justifying. It is a struggle for self-gratification. Then the urge begins to master the thoughts.

THE URGE WAS SUPPORTED BY PREMEDITATION

"And not many days after . . . he took his journey" (Luke 15:13).

The decision had been made—wise or otherwise, it had been made. All that had held him this long was the advancement of the wherewithal to venture forth—his part of the estate. Many forces had been at work. He was ill-advised by those who should have known better; he was spurred on by ill-adopted associates. Finally, sufficient boldness was developed to wage a break. He knew it would pierce his mother's heart. He knew, too, that his father had cherished great expectations for him, but **“the way of a fool is right in his own eyes”** (Proverbs 12:15).

His approach was not curt, but it was resolute. “Father,” he said, “give me the share of the property that is coming to me.” The father deemed it best, under the circumstances, to acquiesce.

The Road of the Wayward

THE ROAD OF THE WAYWARD IS EASY TO ENTER

It is quite likely that there were tears in another home as well. These ventures usually solicit company. To others, such matters are but news items; to parents they are heart-rending experiences. In the spiritual realm, they are grievous to the Holy Spirit. Concerning those who become wayward, the Lord once declared, **“Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle”** (Jeremiah 8:6).

The imagery is most expressive. As the steed is unaware of the danger involved, and increases its pace toward the mouth of the cannon as the spurs are pressed into its body, even so the wayward person presses on, utterly impervious to the inevitable consequences of disobedience.

Yes, it is easy to enter the way of spiritual diversion. One may drift into it. As soon as one puts up the oars of Christian activity and godly exercise, one's little craft is carried into the current of unbelief, indifference and unconcern.

THE ROAD OF THE WAYWARD IS DIFFICULT TO DESERT

It is easier to fall than to rise. One descends through relaxation; one ascends by determination. But determination in spiritual ventures is not very impressive apart from proffered and appropriated divine assistance.

It is this assistance which a backslider is loath to accept. The reason is obvious. Pride characterized the prodigal's departure but humility was prerequisite to his reinstatement. He was boastful in taking his leave; he must needs be broken in effecting his return, and pride does not give way too readily. Pride would rather languish in the throes of bitter disillusionment than bend in the acknowledgment of its blunder.

Those whom Satan draws into the snares of his seductive scheming will weep forever without his sympathy. He laughs at their anguish and delights in their disasters. He revels in the woes of those whom he weakens. He deceives but never relieves. His treatment of those who trust him is epitomized in the lines of a simple verse:

“Lady Golden Rod is swaying
In the soft September air;
She's a princess fair I'm claiming,
With a crown of gold to wear.

“Autumn soon will sad deceive her,
He will set her forth to scorn;
He will steal her gold and leave her
Just a beggar made forlorn.”

How long the younger son wandered away from home is not stated. That is incidental to the picture. It seemed longer than it really was, both to himself and to those at home. One thing can be presumed with safety— he might have started back sooner. The last hindrance the Devil will throw in the course of a wanderer is that decision-preventing monster, Procrastination. When one foot is extricated from the quicksand of doubt and delay he pushes it back in until another day. Procrastination is the thief not only of time but of eternity.

THE ROAD OF THE WAYWARD IS CERTAIN OF FAILURE

The prodigal's rush for wealth plunged him into want. He had nothing to record for his adventure that was elevating or encouraging, and, after his return, he never recommended that any other young fellow should go and do likewise. His unhesitating advice would have been:

“Appreciate a good thing while you have it. Foreign pastures are not as green as they appear.”

It has been aptly stated that “there is no success outside the will of God and there is no failure within.” Blind unbelief and bold indifference try to controvert this statement, and the highways of life are lined with those who are trying to run away from God. Witness the sad plight of Jonah. How successful was he while on a divergent path? To move contrary to the will of God is, in effect, to point one's finger in the face of the Most High, saying, “Thy way is neither right nor desirable. I will devise my own course.” At once the blessing of the Lord is prevented and the life becomes shallow and blighted. Whatever may be the expressed opinions of observers, such an one is empty and useless.

The Remorse of the Wanderer

THE WANDERER WAS OUT OF FUNDS AND WITHOUT COUNSEL

A tender, loving mother may have been pining, “Where is my wandering boy tonight?” But little did those in that otherwise happy household dream that destitution had befallen him who so lately inherited his portion of the estate.

He squandered his money. It went to the very last penny. Yes, it was all gone and his dream had not come true. The world had not fallen at his feet; the fortunes of life had not come under his control; the positions of prestige had mockingly eluded his vain graspings; and where was he? Simply and undeniably in an impecunious state of physical bankruptcy. It was a grim reality to face. Where were his counsellors? Where were those vociferous creatures who had so strongly urged him on?

He was alone— alone to grieve; alone to lament.

If only the spiritual application of this revealing truth could be impressed upon weak, careless Christians, there would be fewer thronging the course of antichristian activity and association.

- No one can feel the grip of poverty more than one who has experienced a sufficiency of all things.
- No one could be more bewildered than the one who has enjoyed the directive wisdom of the Wonderful Counsellor.

THE WANDERER WAS OUT OF FOOD AND WITHOUT COMFORT

Feeding the swine would also be but incidental to the story if it did not furnish us with a belated appreciation on the part of the younger son concerning the provisions of his father's house.

Of all creatures, perhaps none is more ravenous than hogs. They are, seemingly, always hungry. In this respect, the prodigal sustained a likeness to them. The pangs of inward need were becoming increasingly poignant. The food he was giving them was, as is usually true, the leftovers from tables well furnished. This reminded the hungry lad of the table back home which was always heavily laden with delectable and nourishing things. **"How many hired servants of my father's,"** he reminded himself, **"have bread enough and to spare"** (Luke 15:17).

Then, with something of an emotional convulsion, bordering on self-pity, he moaned, **"And I perish with hunger."**

As grim as was the very thought, it was good for him. It was good for him that the extreme cost of a wayward course should be silhouetted against a gloomy and unpromising horizon, there to stare him in the face and say, "You chose it. You have no one to blame but yourself."

This is all so illustrative of the emptiness and drabness of a backslider.

Worldly hilarity cannot satisfy the heart; sinful escapades cannot feed the soul; and hunger will assert itself. Physically, it makes the strongest assertion of all dominant urges.

In the spiritual realm hunger asserts itself as well, but the cry of the soul for nourishment is so persistently disregarded that there results only the emaciated form (*morphosis*) of godliness without the comfort of sacred communion and the refreshment of heavenly bestowments. It is difficult to conceive how one can taste the rich, good things of the Lord and then attempt to subsist on the husks of the world. Yet the Israelites hankered after Pharaoh's bill-of-fare when a table of good things was set for them by the hand of God in the wilderness.

THE WANDERER WAS OUT OF FELLOWSHIP AND WITHOUT FRIENDS

When the secular supports go, as go they will amid life's varied and inevitable vicissitudes, the burden of grief can be greatly alleviated in the amiable atmosphere of cherished loved ones and trusted friends. But when a fellow is on foreign soil where his feelings are not respected and where sentiment finds no affinity, it is a smothering heaviness which begins to settle down upon his soul.

It is that kind of aloneness which has something of the sting of death in its bitterness. It cools the blood, slows down the heartbeat, dulls the initiative and bends the soul in a posture which is difficult to straighten. This is where the prodigal found himself. **"No man gave unto him"** (Luke 15:16b).

The theme of every backslider's heart, though unexpressed, cannot but be, "Oh, how tedious and tasteless the hours when Jesus no longer I see."

- Departure from Him is a weird sojourn in the dark;
- Absence from Him (practically) extracts the sweetness out of life's more pleasant experiences;
- Distance from Him imposes a tediousness resultant from the lack of His precious rest.

This is what the Holy Spirit would have us see as our loss, were we through disobedience to turn into a wayward course. The prodigal's heart was wrung with desperation and remorse.

The Return of the Penitent

MEMORY HAD OPENED A DOOR

When memory began to operate, hope began to revive. He lost sight of the swine and moved in thought back over the divergent and disappointing path which he had so unwisely trodden, and felt, for the first time in ever so long, a sense of joy and happiness in an imaginary visit to the old homestead.

There was Mother, a few more wrinkles in her sweet face, and Dad a bit weary in his pace. There was the home with all its warmth and welcome. What could with this compare? How foolish of any one to leave all this for the hazards of an uncharted course, infested with lurking dangers for such unseasoned travelers as himself. Yes, he remembered better days.

This was the first step in the right direction.

Memory is essential, too, in spiritual rehabilitation. "**Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen,**" the precious Saviour pleads. If one has been born into the household of faith and knows the sweet joys of the family of God, and has, against the counsel of the Father, chosen a way that is not good, memory must operate to start that one back. If he cannot remember something richer, fuller, sweeter, deeper, in the Father's house, and is still satisfied with his wayward course, then there is no strong incentive for his return. When the prodigal looked back through the door of memory, he opened to his weary soul and downcast heart the first warm rays of hope in many a day.

HUMILITY WAS PERMITTED TO DEVELOP

He would go back entirely free of pride and haughtiness—those despicable traits which were so evident at his departure.

- He would confess that he had sinned against heaven and his father.
- He would plead unworthiness to be called a son.
- He would request only the favour of being an hired servant.

He was in earnest. He could not do otherwise under the circumstances. He had failed. He knew the bitterness of terrible defeat. He would pay the price. He still possessed manhood, and now it was showing something of its long ignored strength.

He would overlook the taunts and jeers of the other hired servants and any unfavorable attitude his brother might manifest. It would be hard, but not so hard as his present plight.

If such humility were afforded some opportunity to develop in the countless disobedient children of God, what a revival of unprecedented proportions would ensue! What a strengthening of the poor, faltering testimony of the Church! It would soften the hardened hearts and relax rebellious souls so the Great Potter could mould the clay and make it again to please Him—a vessel unto honour. It would bring the much-needed and greatly longed-for times of refreshing from out of His presence.

DETERMINATION TOOK CONTROL

“I will arise and go!” (Luke 15:18)

All the other recorded parts of his meditation may have been inaudible, but surely these words were spoken aloud—spoken with emphasized resoluteness. He meant to act. This was later proved to be true. He did just that. Much like faith and repentance in their complementary and simultaneous operation, memory, humility and determination comingled to produce an end that caused a whole household to rejoice and a sinning son to rhapsodize in a welcome that was overwhelming. The best robe, the signet ring, the shoes and the fatted calf were subordinate details in contrast to the embrace and kiss of the father. His want gave way to welcome; his humility faded into happiness and his loneliness was lost in the love and light and liberty of home.

The context furnishes the application. **“I say unto you,”** the Lord Jesus informed, **“that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth . . . there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”** (Luke 15:7, 10).

There are not two different “joys” in this quotation. It is one and the same joy, but it is first with the Father and then spreads to the legions of angels—and why? As the father ran compassionately to meet the son and preceded the household in the delight of his return, to be followed by the more general celebration, even so, it seems that our Father in heaven hurries to welcome the repentant wanderer who arises to return. Then all heaven shares the gladness.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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