THE KISS OF GOD

by

Jack MacArthur, Litt. D.

Published by

Voice of Calvary

Box 389

Burbank, California

DEDICATION

The second edition of this humble effort
is dedicated to

KENNETH JACQUES, M.D.

Devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ
Distinguished orthopedic surgeon
Treasured friend

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

No originality whatsoever is claimed for these messages. The author has gleaned freely from many sources. Special mention should be made of a book entitled "The Waste of Sin" by W. W. Melton, published by Fleming H. Revell in 1922, now long out of print. Many portions of the material used came from this source, and the author expresses his appreciation and debt.

PREFACE

This material was presented in a series of brief messages on the Voice of Calvary radio and television programs. In answer to the many requests for these sermons we have prepared this book which contains the entire series.

This eternal story is inexhaustible in its content and remains as fresh and provocative as the day our Lord first told it to His disciples. The lessons are deep and abiding. The unforgettable portrait of the father and the son presents God and the sinner as only our Lord Jesus Christ could paint the picture.

It is our prayer that this little book will tell the story once again, and that the loving Father will, as always, bestow the "kiss of God" in the embrace of eternal forgiveness and restoration upon some wandering prodigal who at last finds his way home.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Riotous Living 1

II. The Famine of Sin 14

III. Homesick for God 25

IV. "I Have Sinned!" 39

V. The Kiss of God 48

VI. Found, Alive, Forgiven, and Restored 59

VII. The Self-Righteous Prig 70

THE KISS OF GOD

Chapter I

RIOTOUS LIVING

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 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.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to

be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

This parable of the prodigal is filled with fascinating and relentless interest. Here life is painted in its naked and dramatic reality. This is a story that no matter how often repeated never grows old. Its truths are familiar to each successive generation. The anguish of the father's aching heart, the folly of the son, the bitter dregs of sin, the remorseful repentance, represents the tragic secrets of many homes and hearts. The Lord Jesus Christ is the

author of this drama, and it surpasses anything that has ever been put on the stage, in conciseness, in point, in fullness and beauty of meaning, in pathos and in power.

The story begins, *And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. (v. 12)* A vital lesson is set out in the very first word. The seed is here planted from which the great harvest of sorrow and shame comes. This is the fountain head from which springs the putrid stream of poison and death found in the after years. This was where it all began; and all the succeeding tragedies were invited when this first sin was committed. The germ of selfishness and the stubborn will it demanded was responsible for the suppurating infection that developed. There would have been no wasting of all if there had been no demanding of all. There would have been no sorrow in the end if there had been no folly in the beginning. The first selfish demand was the matrix from which was spawned all of the tribulation and suffering which was later experienced. Here we see the beginning of sin--the damning, vicious sin which ultimately destroys a life beyond the possibility of repair and sentences it to perdition. This devastating end of sin is actually the result of little sins fully developed.

What is true in this parable is true in life. A little rattlesnake is as poisonous as a big one. One that has a few rattles on its tail is as deadly as one with a great many rattles. All of the poison and the death of the full-grown one is in the nature of the little one, and in like manner, the little sins contain the poison of hell as the larger ones do. Just one drop of rain may well be the forerunner of a great deluge, or the first gust of wind may be the announcement of a coming hurricane, or the first crackle of a flame may be the indication of a disastrous conflagration. Even so, the first deviation from what is known to be right, the first demand of selfish desire, may prove to be the bursting forth of a stream that will carry the spirit to utter ruin.

That great catastrophic tragedy, the crumbling of the St. Francis Dam, whose waters descended with the fury of a thousand Niagaras on the people of California in the valley below, one New Year's evening, was first discovered when

a young man named Dan Mathews noted several little streams coming through the wall of the dam. He gave his warning, but few heeded it. He knew there was not so much danger in a little stream, but he knew that little streams were forerunners of a major tragedy. The sins to be most carefully guarded against are the little ones--the first ones, the seemingly harmless ones--because if these are controlled, there is little to fear concerning the greater, more shameful, more destructive ones. A narcotic addict becomes what he is by accepting the first injection of a narcotic, or perhaps by the smoking of a single marijuana cigarette. An acoholic becomes what he is by taking that first drink, and with that first drink there is not for a moment the realization that he will become a spewing drunkard, a disgrace to himself and those he loves. But it all begins with the first drink.

This verse reminds us of the possibilities and potentialities in every life--both good and bad lie dormant in every heart, waiting to be called out. It would be purely speculative to consider what the prodigal might have been and what he might have done instead of wandering and squandering. Yet it is a speculation that has a note of certainty in it. His life was what it was because he chose it to be so. There is no doubt about the fact that it could have been otherwise, and would have been, had he so determined. He stood at the parting of life's road and was faced with a decision, and ultimately he decided which direction his life would take.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13-14).* The road you choose is undoubtedly life's most important choice, because your direction plus time equals your destiny. The end is inherent in the beginning. Just as the oak is in the acorn, and the fire is in the match, so the sin is in the thought. The harvest is always in the seed, whether we are speaking of grain or deeds, and the harvest we have a right to expect is conditioned upon the seeds that we have sown. The same heart can love or hate. The same tongue

can speak words of honor or of shame. The same life may be a blessing or a curse. These lives of ours can, on the basis of our own desire, be lived for Christ or against Him, with Him or without Him. Your life holds the possibilities of the highest heaven or the very lowest hell, and you alone can determine the course you shall take and the harvest you have a right to expect in the end.

When we ask what was the sin underlying the first step, we must answer by saying that there is no sin in asking and receiving that which was his by the authority of the law, but his sin consisted in magnifying his legal rights to the exclusion of his moral obligation. We can only surmise what caused this young man to act as he did. Perhaps it was a desire to be better acquainted with the kind of a world in which he lived, or perhaps he may have been weary with parental restraint, or it could have been that there was that dangerous desire to be at last independent; but whatever it was, it broke out at last in that impatient demand, "Father, give me!" He knew that by Jewish law he was entitled to one-third of the property at the death of his father, and realizing that he was the eventual heir, he could see no reason why he should not have what was coming to him now. So he said, "Father, give me!"

The expression "give me" is one of the most ignoble expressions in the English language, and back of it is the principle that has caused such inhumanity of man as to make countless thousands mourn. The universal sin is not murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor anything of the kind. These are effects, but not the cause. There is nothing vague about this particular sin. It is as apparent as it is virulent, and the roots and the source of all natural and moral evil are here. We never forgive it in others, but we must honestly admit that we are never without it to some extent in ourselves. In the international world, it inflames the passions of men until the green fields are soaked with the blood of the uncivilized slaughter of humanity in the desire for conquest of territory and the spoils of war. In the commercial world, it arrays capital against labor in bitter strife. In the social world, it leads to extravagance, pride, and racial misunderstanding. In the domestic world,

it enters into the home. It transforms it from a little bit of heaven to a noxious wilderness of hell. This particular sin hindered, denied, betrayed, and at last nailed the Son of God to the Roman rack. In plain words, this universal sin is selfishness. It is the sin that is forever saying "Gimme!"--forever wanting to get, and caring little, if at all, to ever give.

It has well been said that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to establish the doctrine of unselfishness. That is precisely what He meant when He said, *Whosoever loseth his life for my sake shall find it.* The very essence of sin is the desire to do what we please rather than to be constantly looking to God and asking Him what pleases Him. It is an enthroning of self instead of Christ.

And so we read, *And he divided unto them his living.* He yielded after love and reason had failed, and warning and supplication had been disdained. This was his son's choice, and the father could only wait in silence to see the sad, inevitable end.

This is the way that God deals with all of us. We have the gift of self-determination, the opportunity of choice. The man who desires to live independently of God is permitted to do so. God does not force a man into a life of communion with Himself and conscious dependence on Himself; He gives us our choice. If we wish, we can live and die and spend our eternity without Him. God cannot, God will not, God does not, violate our wills. We can go the way we want to go. We have the prerogative, the privilege of choice, but we have nothing to say about the consequences of the choices we make. And if we will learn only through the tragedy of living away from God, if we will learn only by the bitter experience of suffering, tribulation and trials, then He permits us to have those experiences.

It is true that the prodigal eventually returned, but he was covered with the scars of the shame of his sin. He did repent, but he could not undo the past. He did come with bitter tears, but the guilt clung to him forever. Forgiveness never takes away the scars sin has made. The nails can be removed from the post, but the holes will stay there forever. How dangerous it is, and what presumption, to play with sin

and jeopardize our destiny. Multitudes have thus foolishly endangered their souls, and such conduct is comparable to setting fire to a beautiful building and saying, "It can be put out," or like permitting a vicious dog to tear a child's flesh, saying, "It will heal again." These hoped-for ends may come, but oh, how great the risk.

The prodigal was wrecked by his uncontrolled, self-centered, selfish ambitions. The prodigal was an egomaniac.

All through the New Testament we read about demon-possessed people, but George MacDonald says, "Perhaps the worst devil a man can be possessed with is himself. In a case merely of madness, we say a man is beside himself, but in this case, he is inside himself. The indwelling, presiding, inspiring spirit of him is himself, and that is the hardest demon to ever cast out." It reminds us of a hall of mirrors. In every direction the mirrors lure and deceive, promising exits where there are none, and only bringing you face to face with the distorted reflection of yourself again and again--always yourself!

There are people who spend their lives that way. Everywhere they turn, they see nothing but self, and soon it grows to be an exaggerated, distorted, tyrannical self, always being hurt by slights, wearing their feelings exposed, and living in the hell of self-pity. It is too bad that so many of us must be forever learning that the life that pursues only the enjoyment of one's self can never furnish the substance out of which real happiness is produced or in which there is to be found any real worthwhileness in living at all. If a man's life did consist in the abundance of things a man possesses--in titles, indulgences, in the triumphs of fame and of pomp and power, of material success--then the struggle and the strain, with all the things of real worth crowded out and pushed aside, would not be quite so pathetic.

But a man's life, we are clearly told in the Holy Book, does not consist of anything of this kind. Real wealth is not to be found this way. Real wealth is to be found in the knowledge of God in a vital, personal experience with Jesus Christ as the Lord of life and the Saviour of your soul--in a

life of unselfish, sacrificial service, in an appreciation of the values that are spiritual and eternal. The only happy person in the whole universe is the person who is completely yielded to Christ and who lives for others. That is why Jesus said, *Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it...what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 10:39; 16:25).*

The prodigal wanted liberty, but we should never confuse liberty with license to do as we please. That was the prodigal's gravest mistake, and because of this, the wildest profligacy marked his miserable undoing. He lost the sense of life's direction and his life was soon like a ship with no compass, no anchor, and no destination. It became a cruise to nowhere.

Sin always causes others to suffer. The prodigal suffered for his loss, but he was not the only one who suffered. If sin would stop with the one sinning, life would be different, but the father suffered more than the boy. The whole world can be thrown into chaos over the crimes of a single man. The innocent do suffer for the guilty. The suffering that sin has caused God can never be understood or measured. The sin of man has been the grief of God from the beginning of creation, and it was sin that ultimately plied the crucificial hammers that nailed the Lord of glory to a Roman cross. One sin, like a match thrown into a dry forest, can cause a conflagration that will wrap the world in flames.

God Almighty holds us responsible for the forces we set in motion. We are told in the Word of God, *so then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12).* Life, to go right, to be properly controlled, must be yielded to God. Steam is good, but it must be controlled or it can become extremely dangerous. Fire, electricity, and atomic energy are powers for good, but they must be controlled. They may be destructive or constructive. The use will be determined by the user.

Even so, life is plastic, full of potentialities for good or for evil, and life can never be properly controlled and guided and developed to its finest possibilities unless life

is unconditionally yielded to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why God wants you and me to give ourselves to Him wholly, unreservedly, holding nothing back; and only if we thus give Him our lives, can He take them, mold them, and use them for His glory, and give to life meaning, direction, purpose, and fulfillment. Only in a surrendered relationship with Jesus Christ can we ever find in this world and the next, any poise, peace, and happiness.

We read that at last, after taking leave of his father, he arrived in the far country and *there wasted his substance with riotous living.* He made a declaration of independence that outlawed God, and without God life went to pieces. It had no sense. It was the raving of a maniac. His life went wrong because he lost God at its center. When we see the prodigal launching out, we are reminded of the sailing of that mighty mistress of the sea, the Titanic. She was new and magnificent; her rudder had known no storm; her timbers were strong and stout; her passengers were gay and happy; her captain strutted in arrogant pride. All had a false confidence that the ship was unsinkable, but the striking of the gigantic iceberg on the smooth sea, the confusion and consternation of the crew and the passengers, the scramble for the lifeboats, the sinking of the ship, and the loss of 1513 lives tell another story. Every heart is filled with enough wild passions to wreck it if let alone, but life is safe and secure and of eternal worth when it is yielded to the control of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be."

George Matheson

And so we read, *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* The tragedy of it all was that he became a waster. The story of his wasteful years is crowded into a few words, but what awful words they are. Though the statement is brief, it is long and enough to tell a dreadful story of ruin and wreckage. The reveling downgrade speedily hurled him into catastrophe.

He found himself in possession of money and freedom, and that became his peril--and that is the peril of multitudes today! A barnyard philosophy has at last begotten a barnyard psychology of living. Increasingly, restraints and restrictions are thrown off and morality is repudiated. Freedom has become the cry, but license is the tragic result--and it turns out to be not freedom at all, but the very worst kind of slavery.

There is a freedom, a glorious freedom, that is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ, and there is a pseudo-freedom that is really nothing less and nothing else than slavery. Many times when people talk about freedom, they are betraying themselves, because in repudiation of the moral standards of the Word of God, in a freedom that allows men to ride over the laws God has made for the happiness of mankind, such liberty in reveling no more leads to a good time than the delirium of a mad man leads to a good time.

And so the prodigal's so-called freedom became the kind of slavery that stole the peace from his heart, that took the spring out of his step, that robbed him of the glow of hope in his soul, and that brought him at last to famine instead of fame. He was a slave and his world was a prison of pain instead of a paradise of pleasure. He found himself balancing precariously on the very rim of ruin.

Life lived any way without Jesus Christ is wasted, no matter how usefully it may seem to be lived. Life without Jesus Christ is purposeless and empty. There are many who stand on the rim of ruin and do not know it. Life without Christ can only end in bleak, barren failure. Jesus describes men who have never recognized Him, owned Him, and surrendered to Him, as being *lost,* in all the implications of

that terrible word. It is open to you and to me to be the sons of God with the full joy of surrender to the will of our regal Christ and to find in Him glad and ennobling service. It is a matter of choice, and you must choose.

This young man chose wrongly and because of that, the power of sin, instead of lessening, grew stronger. He did not leave home at once. His heart was in the far country before he ever left home. However, it was not very many days until his feet followed where his heart had already gone, and that is the story of sin in every instance. The thought always precedes the deed. *As he thinketh in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7).* When a man starts out on the path of sin, when he starts to have his own way, he never repudiates all the convictions he has learned that are right and good immediately. He begins by throwing away one here and one there, and then it is not very long before he begins his descent with breath-taking rapidity.

On one occasion, I visited the great Mammoth Caves in Kentucky. After you are well within the great cave, suddenly all the lights are turned out and you are plunged into a darkness deeper than midnight. In a very few moments, the sense of direction is entirely lost and before you become the victim of panic, the lights come on, and with the coming of the light, there is a feeling of relief, because you realize that if the guide were not there and if you did not have light, you would never find your way out.

The story of this prodigal shows us how sin seems to snatch the light out of his hands and leave him without guidance, and in fact, he is left entirely to the providence of God to rescue him. At first there was all the money he needed; there were fairweather friends; there was hope; there were dreams. But now the Word of God says, *and when he had spent all*--when the money was gone, the friends, the hope, the dreams and the visions--*there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.* With empty pockets, a hungry body, and a craving passion, uncontrolled habits of licentiousness but no friends, no home, no place to work, the world became a dismal place where hopes lay crushed and buried beneath the debris of a wasted past, while the memories of that past hung

silhouetted against the dark background of rebellion, wantonness, and despair.

What a picture this is of the wreck of sin! Scattered along the trail of human history is the ghastly scene of human wreckage. There is but one explanation, and that is the one word "sin." The world's greatest destroyer is not the thermonuclear bomb--the world's greatest destroyer is sin. That is the reason that sin has been the grief of God from the day of its entrance into the world, on down through the centuries to the dyeing red of the oceans and the saturating of the earth with the dripping blood of slaughtered youth.

Sin will wreck anybody, anything, anytime, anywhere. Sin wrecks nations. Their ruins tell of a former glory lost by sin. The proof is not hard to find. History gives us the names of many nations that once flourished but now are forgotten. Nothing is left but the story of their sad decline and fall, that the world might see what sin will do. We do not need to go so far back as the remote ages. The recent war has a story that can never be forgotten. Sin has made the harvest fields of the world unsightly with the mangled carcasses of a whole generation of splendid young men. Sin has bombed ghastly holes in the citadel of human freedom and has left an indestructible spectacle of murdered nations, broken hearts, wretched humanity, and wounded ideals.

The world's heart is fiercely aching out loud as it weeps in the darkness. The wholesale massacre of humanity empties its viles of wrathful poison upon an inferno of unspeakable agony. Sin is a raving maniac in its blind madness. No wonder that God trumpets to the world, *The wages of sin is death.* But for sin the world would be rapturously basking in the sunlit fields of God; clear skies would be smiling upon it, and the happiest joys would be regnant. The people of the world, instead of being engulfed in a series of wars bringing unspeakable morass and carnage, threatened by thermonuclear bombs and deadly bacteria, would be enjoying the perennial blossoming of the flowers of peace, and inhaling the zephyrs of good will.

Oh, what a dark blot sin has made on the plans of God for man. Sin is darkness, rebellion, villainy, avarice,

treachery, falsehood, covetousness, lust, greed, murder, madness, poison, slavery, plague, shame, and death. It is the vermin of typhus. It is disease, disunity, and disaster, marching with strident steps through the legions of the nations.

Oh, the chaos, the ruin, the ravage, the wreckage of sin. Sin wrecks homes. Consider the fact that in the United States today, three out of five marriages end in failure. When is a home wrecked? When peace, happiness, and love are gone; when confidence and faith are shattered; when mutual trust dies; then the basic institution of civilization, the home, crumbles, and the insidious virus that turns a home into a hell on earth is sin. Sorrow cannot break up a home--it has a tendency to bind those who suffer together, closer. Poverty will not destroy a home where Christ is the center of the home, and those in that home love Him. They will convert the meager circumstances into a foretaste of heaven in this world. But the moment that sin infests the home, love dies, and soon it is transformed into a noxious wilderness. It reaps a harvest of quarreling, heartache, heartbreak, separation, divorce, and disgrace. Any court on earth will be forced to declare "sin has wrecked homes."

What a monstrous destroyer sin is!

> *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*
>
> *Romans 6:23*

Chapter II

THE FAMINE OF SIN

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

The word famine is a terrifying word! What a thought it is that the greater part of the population of our earth is undernourished, and we are warned by eminent men of science that the dramatic population explosion that is now taking place, in a very few years is going to bring famine to the earth, the like of which man has never dreamed. With the earth's resources rapidly being exhausted, and the population increasing in figures that are well-nigh astronomical, the prediction of famine, as an indication of the days before our Lord's return, becomes a vivid, shocking reality. Such monumental distress beggars description. The basic economic problem of the human race is the problem of distribution --"the have's and the have not's." This is one of the major causes of war. Physical famine often comes because we ignore the laws of God respecting the conservation of our resources.

Yet, there is another kind of famine that is actually more serious than the possibility of physical famine, and that is what we might call spiritual famine. There are men who are living in the most deplorable kind of spiritual famine, who have all they need materially and physically, who have plenty to eat, drink, and wear; nevertheless, spiritually, they are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." They suffer from spiritual malnutrition.

It is true that the prodigal deliberately created the famine in his own life by his disobedience, but it does not always work that way, in the realm of the physical. It is an inexorable law in the realm of the spiritual. Men can

appreciate the obvious problem of physical malnutrition and physical starvation, but all too many are completely unaware of the tragedy of spiritual malnutrition and spiritual starvation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ made it very clear that man has a soul as well as a body, and that is exactly what He was speaking of when He said, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).* A reporter heard a senator, as he was coming down the steps of the senate, say under his breath, obviously to no one but himself, "Oh, how hungry I am for God..." The human soul is so capacitated that only God can fill it and satisfy it. Without a relationship with God there is a barrenness of soul that beggars our language to describe, and no picture of destitution could adequately express it. Augustine was right when he said, "Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in thee." Away from God there is always an aching void; away from God there is a bottomless pit of insatiable desire.

It was at this juncture in his life that the prodigal made the discovery of the cause of his emptiness, and in that awareness, he found himself! Without a ray of hope in his sky, without a morsel of bread in his stomach, without a friend to whom he could turn, he was willing to become a slave to any man and do service, if only he might have food. But his food proved to be the husks, and he must take his chance with the hogs for his share. His master proved to be a tyrant who cared nothing for his life, only for the work he could do, and his reward was a hiss and a byword from every passerby. Sin is disgrace, degradation, and the worst kind of slavery.

We read, *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.* Jesus was speaking to Jews, and if there was any position low and degrading in the sight of a Jew, it was that of a swineherd. Herodotus tells us that in Egypt, swineherds were not permitted to mingle with civil society, nor to appear in the worship of the gods, nor would the very dregs of the people have any matrimonial connection with them.

How the young prodigal was stripped of his pride! Here we see him, a poor, ragged, outcast, hungry swineherd.

When our Lord portrayed the prodigal in this predicament, He meant that you and I have our choice between being God's son or hog tenders of the devil. This is the choice that is open to every man. The young man might have been a son in his father's home, in glad, ennobling, well-requited service, but instead of that, he is the hog tender to a stranger. It is open to you to be a child of God, a son of God, in full and joyous surrender to His will, in glad, ennobling, well-requited service, or to be a hog tender to the adversary of our souls. 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. The choice that is left to us is to be a son of God or a swineherd for Satan. The prodigal's life became a career without reason, a life void of sanity and judgment. God does everything He possibly can do to keep this from happening in our lives.

There are at least three sentinels that are stationed along the way of life to hold in check the reckless roamer. Number one is conscience. In every man there is an inborn criterion by which all conduct is measured and classified as good or bad. This silent judge within us must be reckoned with before any man or woman can utterly throw their life away. Conscience is the divinely-appointed guard within the breast to approve the good and encourage its activity, and discourage the evil deed, and condemn it as the thing unworthy of a true man or woman. Conscience in man is simply the factor that makes him decide what is right and is wrong. And even conscience cannot be trusted unless conscience is guided by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that with a "good conscience" he persecuted Christians and even aided and abetted when they were murdered. It was not until his experience on the Damascus Road, when he met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face and his life was transformed, that his conscience began to function as it ought to. The true direction as to what is right or wrong in all moral behaviour is not to be found in

the conscience of man, but it is to be found in the Word of God and in the witness of the Holy Spirit within man's heart. Conscience may be conditioned to be sensitive or dull. It can even be silenced until it can lift not one protest against the vilest crime; but it dies hard, and struggles to the last with the will of man.

Now, not a word is said about the struggle this young man had with his conscience, but if the story is true to life, we know this young man had a well-trained conscience because of the kind of a father he had and the environment in which he grew up. And we know that this valiant sentry stood, whip in hand, to safeguard the life against the evils that threatened it, and not until the conscience lay beaten and defeated was life allowed to go on in the way of licentiousness. Alas, for the man who whips his conscience into silence! Better to have never been born, better to have died in infancy, than to have gone roughshod over this armed guard; better to have died in the first struggle, and to have died in innocence, than to have lost the battle and lived. Let the dying wails of a conquered conscience ring like an echo down to the deepest cavern of the soul, for if the conscience is dead, there is little hope of better days.

The second sentinel that must be passed is reason. Whatever the future held for him in trial, heartache, or distress, he must know that he alone was responsible for it. He must know that his father loved him, that he could have remained at home in peaceable relations, that the life he was living was bad and would lead to a sad end, that his better judgment and his nobler principles rebelled against the downward pull; but sin blinds the reason--it dethrones reason--it makes men act like maniacs. They put the cup of poison to their lips knowing that it will cost them their lives. It leads them to the house of shame, in full view of what it has done to all who have entered before them, yet they gladly follow as an innocent brute is led to the slaughterhouse. A lover of sin will admit the wrong, yet do it joyfully. He will acknowledge the risk, yet enter the gates of the arena and engage in a losing fight, even though he knows it will cost him his peace, his honor, his life, his soul, and sentence him to an eternity in hell.

The New Testament is the greatest book on human behaviour that was ever written. It is reasonable. It makes sense. Christianity invites men to face the facts in an open, honest way. Sin many times strikes the blow before reason can marshal the facts and examine them.

The third guard by which a reckless soul must pass is the voice of God, more powerful than conscience, actually the guiding factor of conscience and more exacting than reason. God Almighty piles life's highways with barriers to prevent us from going in the direction that will cause us to be ultimately, irrevocably, and eternally lost; but if you disregard the voice of God, there is nothing more that He can do. If, when the Holy Spirit speaks as only He can speak, in that sacred sanctuary of your soul, and you say "No"; if you somehow fight off the loveliness of Christ as it casts its spell over you; if you say an eternal "No" to the love that will not let you go; if you reject Jesus Christ, the day, the time will come when He must reject you. If you are ashamed of Him, He must be ashamed of you. If you give your life, influence, and strength to the powers of hell while you live here, with those same powers in hell shall you spend your eternity. Not that it is God's will, but that God cannot help Himself.

This is not an irreverent statement. He did all within His power to save you. Peter tells us, He is *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* There is nothing left that needs to be done. We rightfully sing:

"Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

But if you reject His provision, His mercy, His love, His grace, all of our Lord's effort in your behalf, in the great redemption He wrought, was in vain. You did not accept it. But in the words of the wise man, Solomon, *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh (Prov. 1:24-26)*--these are

not words to scare and frighten, but are sober words of truth. Hear them and live!

Our blessed Lord said, *him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.* God said solemnly, *My spirit will not always strive with man.* And so it is that God stands in every pathway of life to keep us from following the road that leads to ruin. God speaks through conscience. God speaks through the infallible testimony of His own Word, and God speaks directly by the person of the Holy Spirit, and we are warned, *Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Heb. 4:7).* Again the Holy Book says, *He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Prov. 29:1).*

No man can pass these three sentinels in life without realizing three effects. First, he loses his moral sensitivity. He ceases to be alarmed at his wrong. Sin loses its sinfulness. It becomes tame and commonplace. It loses all its terrors. The soul becomes dull and unresponsive. The conscience is seared, burned beyond feeling as though branded with a hot iron.

Secondly, no man can pass these three sentinels in life without the loss of will power. The loss of will power is the inability to do what one knows is right or refrain from doing what is admittedly wrong. The mind may be convinced, but there is not enough force and power to put into effect what is clearly seen to be right or a duty. That is the problem of the drunkard, the alcoholic, the libertine, the dope addict. It is the trouble with the immoral everywhere. Sin has broken down their power to execute. Such cases fill us with pity. These are prisoners bound by invisible chains. These are slaves, tied to the girdle of an unseen master, like men in a delirium, seeing snakes they cannot kill, or approaching chasms they cannot escape. The habit of sin is like a cable. The first strand may be broken with ease, but the next makes it doubly strong, and soon it binds with the grip of a vise.

Thirdly, no man can pass these three sentinels in life without sustaining the great loss, the final passing, of all interest and concern for the soul. Sin makes one reckless, bold, and daring. Finally, men give up and abandon them-

selves to a hopeless hell. Their capacity to feel is dead.

In South America there is a plant known as the sensitive plant. When touched, it quivers in every leaf and tendril like the string of a violin, but each time it is touched, the response is lessened until finally, the plant has been touched to death and it gives no response and hangs flabby and unresponsive. So it is that the soul can be touched to death until ultimately it has passed the possibility of salvation. Many a man carries about in his living body a coffined soul.

The prodigal had gone a long way on the broad road to destruction. Life without God had gone to pieces. It had no sense or meaning. He was a waster, outlawing God with his selfish declaration of independence. Instead of finding the happiness he envisioned, he found only indescribable, abysmal misery. How many times the mass of our population envies the fame and the success that some few seem to be enjoying, actually believing that their success is bringing them happiness--a happiness that the majority envies. But the truth is that many of these folk, if not most of them, are absolutely miserable.

According to one of our news magazines, a young "rock and roll" singer was paid the unheard-of sum of $250,000 plus 50% of the net profits for a "rock and roll" picture. This allowed him to coin the most money ever earned by a star in a single film. A New York reporter asked for an interview with this young man in order to find out whether or not he was really happy. Here are some of the questions and the answers: "Do you plan to be a power for good, and direct some of your fans' energy into useful channels, such as combatting juvenile delinquency?" Answer: "Juvenile delinquency isn't wearing long hair and a leather jacket...I never thought of using my power in a good way...I've just been taking everything as it comes." Question: "Do you feel secure yet, as an entertainer?" Answer: "Man, I'll tell you, I don't know. I'm not sure whether I've got it made." Question: "Have you everything you want now?" Answer: "No, I'll tell you one thing, I sometimes get lonely as hell."

Perhaps by now, the situation has changed, but this interview would indicate that this popular young man, who

is dramatically successful in the doubtful world of the "rock and roll," is nevertheless dreadfully confused as to what the real meaning of life is, and he frankly admits that he is tragically unhappy, emotionally insecure, and unspeakably lonely. No one can ever be satisfied with the husks of life. Real happiness is found in surrendering to Jesus Christ and knowing the conscious joy of His presence.

In the experience of the prodigal, like that of every other man who follows the course of sin, it was false hope that continued to lure him on. He kept hoping that conditions would change, that they would get better, that his luck would turn. On he went, led by the false lights along the shore until he found himself dashed upon the reef, a total wreck. The life of evil is ever so. Men are swept into it, little by little. They are borne down, step by step. Their only hope is that a change will come and bring better fortune. But alas, it is a hope against hope. The eventide turns to midnight black.

The prodigal did not need to go the way that he went. His conduct cannot be explained by so-called fatalism. He was responsible for his choice, his action, his conduct, and what is true in his case is true of men in all ages. God gives the gift of self-determination; and God, because of His omniscience, knows what we will do, but we are at the controls and we do the doing.

Some years ago a Denver-bound train, running out of Fort Worth, Texas, came to the big Wichita River. The heavy rains had swelled the river until the water was tipping the bridge beams spanning the river. The train moved slowly on to the bridge, but in a moment it was brought to a stop and quickly it reversed its course and backed off. In a few moments, the great bridge went down with a terrible crash, and a major catastrophe, in which hundreds would have perished, was avoided. The extremist is ready to cry "Predestination," but a better explanation would be "Common sense," or simply "Good judgment," in the light of the facts. No one would say that the engineer had to reverse his throttle and was therefore compelled to act as he did, but taking into consideration all of the facts, and using reason and good common sense, he reversed the wheels of

his engine and backed the train off the bridge.

That is exactly what the prodigal could have done and should have done. He could have stopped at the end of the first day and returned. The story of those fateful years would never have been told. They would never have occurred, but his desire, his stubborn will, his choice, led him on, and what that prodigal could have done, any prodigal can do. The perverted notion of liberty had bound him hand and foot and made him the worst of slaves. The thoughts and dreams of independence had led him to be the most dependent of all creatures. The bread of plenty had been given for the husks of poverty. The unchained passion within him had torn his clothing into rags and sent him into the fields to feed pigs. The word slavery is the word describing all men who fall into the path of sin. *Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin (John 8:34).* He literally belongs to Satan. His mind, body, soul, his total personality are under the power of this demon.

In the seventh chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul tells about the helpless inward struggle that men have with sinful desire and their absolute helplessness in its grasp. We want to do right, but we find ourselves unable to carry out our desires, and finally we reach the place in the captivity of sin where we cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" We have sold ourselves! We have become the plaything of the adversary, to be toyed with in the same manner that a cat toys with a half-dead mouse. We are bound by chains that will not break.

The story is told of a famous smith of medieval times who, having been taken prisoner and hidden away in a dungeon, began to examine the chain that bound him in the hope that he could find a flaw in it where it might be broken. But soon he discovered that it was a chain of his own make, and he had often boasted that no one could break the chains that he made. Even so, men are forging chains that shall bind themselves, and chains that cannot be broken. Every evil word, deed, and thought strengthens the links until nothing but the coming of Christ, the great Deliverer, can rescue them and set them free. And that is exactly what

the apostle says, when in Romans 7:25 he calls our Lord Jesus Christ the great Liberator, saying, *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* In Him and Him alone is there strength and power to break the shackles of sin and set a man really free. Our Lord said, *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (John 8:36).*

It is well to note that the Word of God says, *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.* With all his guilt, he was not *a citizen,* but a stranger in that *far land.* He did not feel at home. The citizen did. The famine had not touched him. His condition was completely hopeless, because he did not even know what it was like to be in want. He felt no emptiness, no need. There is hope for the one who feels himself a miserable alien in the land of sin, but there is no hope for the one who makes himself a citizen. For him, the battle has already been lost forever. Jesus said that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. What our Lord meant was that any man who approaches Him in self-righteousness will find nothing. It is only the penitent sinner who will find in Him forgiveness and light. The citizen of the story would one day be destitute, but for him there would be no place to return, because he had passed the point of "no return."

True, that in this picture there is set forth a deeper level in the sinner's downward course than that of the prodigal, for here we have a fall within a fall, a more entire self-conscious yielding of himself--heart and will--to the service of evil. Our sorrows should be even greater for the citizen, because for him there is no hope. The prodigal sold himself to the world, and he became its slave, so that the world used him as its drudge and as is so often the case, he became cheap in the esteem of the very world in whose service he had forfeited all. It rejected him as the sea after awhile rejects the carcasses which it has swallowed up.

But thank God, unlike the citizen, his very bankruptcy turned his feet toward home. Entangled in the meshes of sin, his manhood gone, his future hopeless, his willpower enchained, his very existence under the heavy hand of evil

habits and passions, it became evident that nothing short of desperation could be expected unless some kind of a hand could break this spell of gloom and open the door of hope,, and fire the soul with a new spirit of courage, and that is what rescued him at last. He decided to throw himself on his father's mercy, and risk the consequences. He recognized the light that would dispell the darkness, the hope that would drive away his despair.

For all of us who seek our matchless Christ, there is a light that will dispell the darkness forever, and there is a hope that will drive away despair forever. Our Lord Jesus Christ clarions to the lost world--*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).*

Chapter III

HOMESICK FOR GOD

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

This scene is unforgettable, as we see the prodigal sitting at last among the pigs, in tatters and dirt, staring through the eyes of the stark madness of his insanity, and in that wretched prodigal is the picture that God has painted on the dark canvas of every soul that is alienated, separated, and away from God. The external condition of the prodigal, in the story Jesus told us, was but the symbol of the internal condition. That he was unhappy is beyond the possibility of argument. His misery was not because of his lack of material resources, not because he was a poor man, not because he had lost everything, not because there was a famine, not because he was perishing with hunger, not because he was living with hogs. If this unfortunate circumstance had been brought about by his dedicated devotion to God, and he had willingly accepted it, he would be experiencing, in the midst of all the degradation, the peace that passeth understanding.

For example, here are two men in a concentration camp in Russia. One is there for stealing; the other is there because, in spite of an edict against it, he preached the unsearchable riches of the Lord Jesus Christ and defied the atheistic, communist regime. Refusing to renounce his Lord and Saviour, he remained true, even though it could cost him his life. The two men are in prison. One is

strangely happy--the other is abysmally unhappy. The one is there because he has committed a crime, and if he has a conscience, he is living in the disapproval of his conscience, and under such guilt he would be wretched. The other man has the approval, the blessing, and the peace of a conscience devoid of offense, and therefore, the benediction of God rests upon him.

Paul and Silas, in the dirty, damp, dungeon of the prison at Philippi, sang songs of joy at midnight, even after they had been mercilessly stripped and beaten. They were happy because they were completely free from a consciousness of guilt, because they had not committed a crime. They knew and fully realized that they were there because they had been true to the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, the Scripture tells us there were others in the prison at Philippi who were groaning, crying, and cursing their fate. Most of them had been caught in their crimes, tried, and condemned to the punishment they were enduring.

John Bunyan was happy although he was imprisoned in the narrow confines of the Bedford jail, and it was during his incarceration that he gave to the world the immortal allegory, "Pilgrim's Progress." The martyrs frequently marched to the stakes and the flames, and to their death, singing. Happiness is not determined by what a man has or has not; neither is happiness geographical--it is not determined by where a man is or is not. As a matter of fact, many of the wealthiest who can have any material thing they might desire or go any place they please, are among the most unhappy. The majority of suicides is consistently in the upper income bracket. Likewise, many of the people who do not have much of this world's goods and who have little possibility of ever traveling very far are the happiest people on earth. Happiness is determined by the internal condition--by what a man is on the inside--and it is the by-product of the soul that is living in a right relationship with God and man. It is the state of the soul that knows the peace of a clear conscience and the resources of a vital, living relationship to God through Jesus Christ. The prodigal was not unhappy because all was gone, but because with it went his moral worth, his spiritual heritage, and he felt his soul

was lost. He was miserable because he knew it did not need to be that way!

When Rear Admiral Richard Byrd lost his bearings in the Antarctic night, the awful realization came over him that he had missed the way. He said, "I knew I was lost and I felt sick inside." Men feel mentally, spiritually, and even physically sick inside when they know that they are lost, when they are not sure of the way, and when the old landmarks have been obliterated, and when they do not know how to find their way about in a universe of this kind. They are puzzled and hurt and "sick inside," and even a bold exterior cannot hide the inner emptiness and loss of bearings. Like a blind man tapping with his cane on the sidewalks, so modern man is tapping from event to event by an everyday experimentalism, trying to find his way home.

Somebody has said, "There is only one sickness, and that is homesickness." Whether modern man knows it or not, that is his chief sickness. He is homesick. He knows that he has one foot in time and another in eternity, and he doesn't feel at home in either one. He is afraid of both. As the old Negro expressed it in the familiar song, "Tired of livin' and scared of dyin'!"--man is afraid because he can't put these two together and make them come out with any kind of sense. Bluntly, he is lost and knows it!

The prodigal tried to satisfy himself with husks. The husks here referred to are familiarly recognized as the pods that contain what is called the carob bean. They are the fruit of the carob tree. These carob pods were used to feed pigs, because they were cheap and plentiful.

There is a pathos that is infinitely sad in the words that he tried to satisfy himself with the husks that the swine did eat. I think the fact, that the prodigal tried to satisfy his hunger with the husks the swine ate, is preserved for our benefit. It is an illustration of how men will try to satisfy themselves when in such crises, before they will denounce it all and return to the father's house. It is amazing to what depths men will go, until they cry at last, "I am wrong. I have sinned!"

When men see the shame of their lives, they first try to cover it, even from their own eyes. They often go a step

farther and quit part of it. They reform in a measure, but reformation is no cure, no antidote, for the wasted past. Only God can meet our real need. Many try to satisfy the hungering soul with husks. They appeal to the gaudy, painted world with its brief pageant, its short-lived joys, its aimless tumult and hubbub, but the heart wants something more than a masquerade, something more than the sight and sounds that please the eye and the ear for a moment, only to leave the real man still unsatisfied as he impatiently asks, "Is this all?"

When the question is asked, "Can mammon satisfy the hungry soul?" we immediately recognize that there never was a deity served with greater devotion by his devotees than day by day is lavished on mammon. But does this satisfy man's spiritual hunger? The value of money is in what it will buy, and it will not buy us true satisfaction, peace, hope, moral dignity, or spiritual reality. Nothing in the realm of things can ever satisfy the soul. The human spirit cannot digest gold. The rich fool in the parable sought to indulge in such a delusion, but he only proved his folly by doing so. So little can mammon do for our real happiness that we are in the habit of distinguishing the most devoted of its worshippers, the very high priests of its shrine, with the title of "Misers", implying that they are, of all men, the very most miserable. Even fame and achievement are only husks when it comes to the satisfaction of the soul. Think of the myriads who committed suicide when they were at the very top rung of successes' ladder--when they had mounted the highest pinnacle in the world of fame.

How pathetically sad are the words that describe the unanswered appeal of the prodigal--*no man gave unto him.* We do not need the Bible to tell us that people are not interested in our spiritual welfare. Whether that little line was meant to teach that lesson or not, the great fact stands unchallenged in life. It is an easy matter to find friends who are willing to help us spend our money. When a man is up on the world, he does not need your praise; the idle crowd will praise him to the skies, but when he is down, when his money is gone, and his health is broken, and his friends

have deserted, and hope is dying, that is when your presence, your praise, your encouragement, will mean something.

David said, *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul (Psa. 142:4).* This was the cry of an utterly discouraged man--the wail of one, who tired and weary, was ready to give up, feeling that, after all, life was not worth-while. He had reached the place of extremity in despondency, and the more complex our civilization becomes, the more that cry is heard from the hearts of men, the more men try to find their way out of the enmeshment, entanglement, and confusion of the civilization in which we live, the more they try through crass materialism to find peace, happiness and joy, the more multitudes are saying the same words David said, in the same attitude of despair, *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul (Psa. 142:4).*

The fact that one hundred thousand people in the United States attempt suicide every year, is an indication of the fact that there are multitudes who become so despondent that life no longer holds any meaning for them. They prefer a leap into the dark unknown rather than to face the stark reality of living. Christians, I would remind you that on all sides about us, in everyday life, wherever we contact people, there are those who are waiting for a word--a word that will bring help and light. No matter what the exterior, no matter how braggadocio the manner, do not forget:

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Cords that are broken can vibrate once more."

The cry of the psalmist was exactly the same as that of the prodigal--*No man cared for my soul.*

As we look at the institutions of men, as we consider the down-dragging tendencies of our world, as inch by inch and day by day we come closer to the yawning abyss of thermonuclear destruction, we see that the matter of soul-concern belongs exclusively and only to those who are close to and living in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The secular world is blindly oblivious to the spiritual condition of mankind. Education does not care about the souls of men. Recreation does not care about the souls of men. Pleasure does not care about the souls of men. The sinful pleasures of this world are deteriorating in their course and utterly destructive in their end. Governmental institutions do not care about the souls of men. Their prime interest and concern is with our physical security, constitutional rights, the preservation of idealism, an adequate solution to our political and economic problems. Lodges, fraternal orders, service clubs have little interest in the souls of men, although they may be interested in their members in many other approved areas of life.

However, the true church cares, and every brick that built the church is covered with the dripping blood of those who gave their lives that men and women might be brought from the darkness of night to the light of love in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the only institution in the world that cares, and if it does not care, it is not a church. In saying that, we are saying that real Christians care. They care as the Lord Jesus Christ did, and the deepest desire and motivation of their lives is to lead others into the glorious fellowship of the Redeemer they have come to know in a personal relationship.

Yes, Jesus Christ cares. He proved it--proved it beyond a shadow of contradiction; proved it so it can never be doubted; proved it by the blood-sweat in that black, horrible night in the Garden of Gethsemane. He proved it by the blood that dripped from His ugly, gaping wounds on Calvary. Far back in the Old Testament it was written, *Without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sin.* So one day our Lord Jesus Christ identified Himself with our humanity and became our Saviour, and one day on the hill of the skull, He died on an ugly, cruel cross like a butchered animal, grotesque and naked. He proved He cared! He proved it so that it can never be questioned. He proved it by the blood that He shed. He proved it in the tears that came from His wounded soul.

"He died of a broken heart for you,
He died of a broken heart for me;

O wondrous love for you, for me,
He died of a broken heart."

But that was not the end! For though death had slain Him in the body, it had no claim upon His spirit.

"Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign."
Robert Lowry

He proved that He cared when, on the resurrection morning, He stepped forth from the tomb in the dazzling splendor of His resurrection body and when He said, *Because I live, ye too shall live also.*

David said, *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.* Then he said, *I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living (Psa. 142:5).* Glorious truth--there is a way out of the darkness into the light. There is a way from the pigpen to the father's house. There is a way out, but there is only one way, and that is by the One who said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).*

The story of the prodigal is the story of a man who went away from God. The sad decline and the degradation and destitution that follows is immutable and inevitable. Just as a great airliner is destined for disaster when its navigational instruments fail and it loses any visible contact with the earth, so we must face the fact that if we lose contact with God, we have lost God. In losing God we lose our moral direction. We lose our spiritual sensibilities. We lose our contact with the supernatural, and soon there is an utter lack of sense to life. Because we have lost God, we become restless, and that is the reason that men and women are searching frantically for a peace that constantly eludes them.

Our generation is victimized with nervous tension, a revolt against all restraint, a terrible gnawing fear. We have the highest standard of living in the world, but it has not brought us any real measure of happiness. The world

is madly searching for some kind of an answer before we blow ourselves to atoms, and it is a wonderful fact that philosophers, scientists, diplomats, political leaders and intellectuals are beginning to say, "We need God!"

We have nationally followed the path of the prodigal, but instead of calling it prodigality, we call it escapism. We have 5,000,000 alcoholics. The sale of narcotics is at an all time high. The dosage of tranquilizing pills is in the millions. Sales for the coming year are estimated at $160,000,000. We are almost wearing ourselves out in an effort to entertain ourselves.

The confusion of man is seen even in art, where man is scarcely recognizable any more. I do not know much about art, but looking at the pictures in a recent magazine, at what is considered the expressive art of our generation, man is portrayed, not as we have known him, as a creature made in the image of God, but as some vague, meaningless mass of indeterminable, irrational hodgepodge. Even the artist seems to see nothing but a confused splotch on his canvas. Much of our popular music witnesses to this same fact and is a tonal monstrosity, harking back to the jungle.

The mood of America is indicated by the fact that the psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and psychologists are doing a tremendous business, and they are so neurotic themselves that in numerous instances they are going to see each other for help. We have tried substitutes for God as the prodigal tried to satisfy his hunger *with the husks that the swine did eat,* and we have found that only God can meet our need.

David, like the prodigal, made the discovery that his answer was a definite experience with God.

How full of meaning are the words, *he came to himself.* These are words with deep significance, saying as they do, that to come to one's self and to come to God are one and the same thing; that when we truly find ourselves, we find Him; or rather, having found Him, we find also ourselves. Christianity is not a blind faith. It is a rational faith that comes from honest, searching, candid contemplation of the evidence available.

The prodigal began to think. The trouble with most of those who are outside of Christ is that they will not

think. They deliberately refuse to think. They will not read a book that will make them think. If you could get men and women who are outside of Christ to think for thirty consecutive minutes on the relation of their souls to God, the majority of them would be saved.

It was when he began to think that he came to himself. The words, *he came to himself,* imply that his former state was one in which he was beside himself, in which he was mad, spiritually insane. Self-will is moral insanity. Coming to himself, the prodigal not only recovered his sanity, but having done so, he dared to face the facts about himself. Thank God he came to himself! Sin is moral and spiritual insanity, and when the prodigal came to himself, his insanity ended and sanity began. Every form of insanity will bring to your recollection corresponding forms of sin.

A minister of gracious disposition spoke in anger to his physician. This physician was about the best friend he had in this world and was even then doing his very best to help. The physician, in explaining the unkind words of his friend, said, "He was delirious. He was not himself at all."

The story is told of a man who came out of the Ozark mountains in his early years with the firm purpose of making a fortune. Gold became his god, and putting it first, he won it. He came to be worth millions, and then there was the stock market crash in 1929 and he was reduced to poverty. His reason tottered. He lost his mind. He became a beggar, a vagabond. One day the police found him on the Eads Bridge, gazing down into the waters of the Mississippi. The officer ordered him to move on. "Let me alone," he answered, "I am trying to think. There is something that is better than gold, but I have forgotten what it is." They finally put him into an institution for the insane. They knew that a man who could forget that was not at all himself.

What a wise thing it is to look truth frankly in the face. Many times, people who are suffering from some physical malady will not consult a physician for fear they might be told what is wrong with them, and it might be incurable--as if a fact could be destroyed by ignoring it!

This man dared to take a good, square look at himself, and looking, this is what he discovered. "I perish with

hunger. I am starving to death; and not only so, but I am starving needlessly. How many hired servants of my father's have bread and enough to spare?" He had been under a hallucination. No doubt, if someone had charged him with insanity, he would have denied the charge, and if the physician's certificate had been required to prove his soundness of mind, he could easily have gotten one from one of the *far country* doctors, who possibly had sat at his table while his money lasted and freely drank his wine. But it would not have been so easy to get such a certificate from his own father or God. A man comes to himself, when at last he listens to the three sentinels and obeys them--conscience, reason, and the voice of God. When he came to himself, he saw his circumstances realistically, and his prodigality was seen to be utterly unnecessary. This is what must take place in every life before a radical change comes in our direction.

What brought him to himself? First, his misfortune. If life had been filled with prosperity and reverses had not come, it is quite certain that the turning point would never have been reached. Hardship, sorrow, misfortune, and even tragedy are often angels of mercy. Jerry McAuley found Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and was marvelously transformed and became a mighty missionary to other outcasts. This great experience came to him while he was serving time in a cell of Sing Sing prison. Shut off from his associates and forced to a place where he would have time to think, the spirit of God reached his darkened heart. Sometimes the loss of a loved one, the death of a little one, has caused the heart at last to turn for comfort and help to God.

Secondly, his reason brought him to himself. Facing the facts of life, he could not get away from what he had been, compared to what he was at the present. If men are willing to decide their Christian convictions on cold facts and honest investigation, they are invited and challenged to such a task by the words of Isaiah, *Come now, and let us reason together.* There is not a principle of Christian revelation that is afraid of light and investigation. Christianity will measure its facts by the standards of the most critical, provided of course, the approach is utterly honest.

Thirdly, the prodigal was brought to himself by the thought of his father and his love, and no man can possibly contemplate for any length of time, the love of God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, and not be awakened and find such a love to be utterly irresistible. It was the prayers of the mother of Dr. R. A. Torrey, in the early hours of the morning that prevented him from suicide and that made him surrender his life to God. Dr. Torrey was 427 miles from home at the time, but his mother's prayer reached him there, and in the consciousness of God's presence, Dr. Torrey came to himself.

Thank God, *he came to himself.* That was the high point in the prodigal's life, and having come to himself, he made a decision. He said, *I will arise and go.* It is not enough to think--you must resolve. With that resolve to go, he instantly regained his sanity.

It is interesting that every form of insanity is evident in the various kinds of sin. In Ecclesiastes 9:3 we read, *the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live.* That word *madness* means insanity. Here God makes the striking assertion that every impenitent man is insane, and the insanity of which the Bible speaks is a disease of the soul, resulting in a disorder of the self-determining powers and an impairment of the volitional powers of man. A man may be sane with regard to material things and utterly irrational and insane on moral and spiritual issues. It can be proved that hard-boiled businessmen, able organizers, wise leaders, prudent administrators, clever writers, far-seeing statesmen--men who are intellectually the sanest of the sane--are yet possessed with an attitude of the heart which compels them to act in the realm of spiritual things as if they were hopelessly insane. This is a remarkable diagnosis the Bible makes of the moral and spiritual condition of every unsaved man. God speaks of this as "madness of the heart" or "soul insanity."

One of the characteristics of the insane is that in many cases they think their best friends are their worst enemies. They develop delusions of persecution. They turn against those that in normal situations and relationships they should naturally love and appreciate the most. They become

furtive, suspicious, even homicidal. And is this not a frequent attitude of the unsaved toward God and His people? Our Lord Jesus Christ, describing Israel's rejection of Him, said, *This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:15).* The impenitent man runs away from God, but leaving God will rob him of his joy in life. He studiously avoids and evades the subject of God, of Christ, of sin; and yet the same God so loved that man that He actually died to prove the reality of His love. The impenitent man considers every Christian an enemy to be avoided, especially if that Christian is anxious to win him to the Saviour. Many unsaved people consider the effort of God's people to lead them into fellowship with our wonderful Lord nothing less than conspiracy. When you approach some people with a Bible, they will react and act as if you had a gun or a bottle of poison. When we ask, where did this irrational attitude toward a loving God and His people come from, the answer is that it is a mark, a characteristic, of "soul insanity."

Secondly, the insane are subject to some overmastering delusion, some overpowering idea, contrary to fact which often grips them and obsesses them and governs their conduct. They are victims of hallucinations. There is not necessarily any truth whatever in what they imagine, but it is tragically real to the insane. A delusion controls their lives.

Similarly, the unsaved man lives and dies in the grip of some deadly delusion, and there are many. There is the delusion, for example, that men are all right as they are and do not need the experience of regeneration--the delusion of self-righteousness. Then there is the delusion of a false cult or a false religion with its fatal deception. Also, there is the tragic delusion that there is plenty of time to establish this important relationship with God.

Thirdly, the insane have no true sense of values. The insane will prize trifles and ignore what is really valuable.

Jesus pointed this out when He said, *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37).* To throw away the soul for some temporary gain is madness. Soul insanity is spiritual suicide. We recognize that sanity sometimes returns at intervals, and that for some there are moments when the mind is clear and reasonable.

This analogy also holds true in the spiritual realm. There are moments when the Holy Spirit convicts and enlightens the minds of the unsaved, and they see the truth and the sweet reasonableness of spiritual things. For example, perhaps reading these lines, makes eternal values seem different. Spiritual truths are seen to be real and the world loses its grip for a moment because you are under the grip of the world to come. In the name of our wonderful Lord, this is the moment in which to act. Insanity of the soul can be cured! In the fifth chapter of Mark we have the story of the maniac of Gadara, who was demon possessed and violently insane, but our wonderful Lord delivered him. By the wonderful power of God, this man whom no man could bind, no, not with chains, was gloriously saved and was found clothed in his right mind and sitting at the feet of Jesus. Like the prodigal, he came to himself. This is where the madness of the heart ends and soul sanity begins --at the feet of Jesus.

And so having come to himself, this young man made a decision and said, *I will arise and go.* He did the wise thing. Repentance, confession, and restoration are natural for men when they come to themselves.

When he came to himself, he started for home. Here is the principle of salvation. Repentance must precede forgiveness. Forgiveness without a sense of shame for sin would be ignoring sin rather than recognizing it. Had he not come to himself and realized his sin, there would have been no use for him to return. Instead of the father's heart being compassionate, it would have been one of stone, and the hushed words of forgiveness would never have been spoken.

The only way a sinner can come to God is with an

honest, sincere confession of his sin and need, and on that basis God is willing to receive, to forgive, and to cleanse the vilest sinner on earth. Oh, how wonderful that that is the only requirement! For we are promised, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).*

Chapter IV

"I HAVE SINNED!"

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.

I do not know how long this young man had been away from his father's house, but there is something about the reading of this text that makes me know he was homesick. Some of us have known what that feeling is like. Far away from home, sometimes surrounded by everything bright and pleasant with plenty of friends, you have felt that longing that made you say, "I would give the world to be home this night."

I am reminded of the British poet, David Gray who, far away from home, became a victim of tuberculosis. Sick unto death, he was doomed to die and he became desperately homesick. He wrote to his parents, "Dear Parents: I am coming home. Homesick. I cannot stay away from home any longer. What is the good of one's being so far from home and sick? Oh God! I wish I were at home, never to leave it more. Tell everybody that I am coming back. No better--worse, worse. What's about climate, about frost, snow, or cold weather when one is at home? I wish I had never left. I have no money. I want to get home, home, home. What shall I do? O God! Father, I shall steal to you again because I did not use you rightly. Will you forgive me? I have come through things it would make your heart ache for me. Get my little room ready quick, quick. Have it all tidy and clean and cozy against my homecoming. I wish to die there, and nobody shall nurse me except my own dear mother, ever, ever again. Oh, home, home, home." There is something unspeakably pathetic about the homesickness of David Gray the poet!

This young man in our story was homesick for his father's house, and how many there are who, like him, are homesick for God. As a generation, we dope ourselves with amateur psychology; we buy up all the books of the peace of mind cult, pitifully confident that it is possible to have peace of mind in our kind of a world; we follow preachers who hock formulas for banishing worry, fear, and tension, while the prophets of God, with their painful judgment requiring repentance, go unheeded. We wistfully turn to "inspirational" speakers and are left with a terrible emptiness, loneliness of soul, and desperation of spirit. Every once in awhile we realize that we are renegades from our true nature--we have never really come to ourselves.

Today, man is experiencing a tragic sense of failure--failure in living. We are brilliant but unhappy, clever but unstable, comfortable but comfortless. We overemphasize physical security and we are emotionally and spiritually immature and insecure. We own so much and possess so little. We are forlorn souls groping, hungering and lost. Once again as in the garden of Eden, man is a fugitive from God and bereft of spiritual resources. One of our Voice of Calvary listeners wrote and said that for thirty-nine years he had been living without God, but hearing the message, he discovered what was wrong. He said, "Since embracing Jesus Christ as the Lord of my life and the Saviour of my soul, I feel as if I have been raised from the dead!" The new life in Christ is exactly that...resurrection!

The prodigal did not stop at resolving; he did not excuse himself. He did not say, "Young men must be young men and sow their wild oats." He did not say, "I inherited my desires and appetites and I am not responsible." He did not argue that he was nothing but a protoplastic mass waiting to become manure or a fly that would soon be ground up in the tremendous machinery of the universe. Nor did he say, "Others have done worse than I." He did say, "Father, I have sinned."

We come now to the sublime picture. The dark night is past, the shadows are being driven back by the coming of the glorious sun of the morning. The struggles in which

the life, the manhood, the character and the soul of the man are involved, are about to come to a glorious conclusion. And this is not an experiment. It is a final step. A step that is to be made after the sanest, most heart-searching reasoning, and after the hardest and most stubborn battle that ever takes place in the heart of a man. This sudden turn back home was not a "spur of the moment" act--it was the result of long hours of bitter anguish and struggle in the soul where the voices of the higher and the lower were in conflict.

Even so is the return to God always the result of such a struggle. Regeneration is not an experiment, it is not a temporary venture. It is a definite and final decision that cuts the last ties with the old life and a plunge into the arms of God for safety and protection against the evils that have preyed upon him in the past. Regeneration means something! It is more than deciding to do better. It means that the soul has been in agony before God over past sins, and that with the whole life, with the whole soul, the individual has thrown himself on God for mercy and forgiveness.

Regeneration means something! It is not trying out a better life, and if you succeed in doing better, you will continue; but if not, you can go back to the old life. There is no probation period in this matter. It is a final decision. It is made without reservation or one single thought of returning to the old life. It crystallizes the direction of life forever.

History tells us that great soldiers, before their crucial battles, as Caesar at the Rubicon, Lord Clive at Plassey, and Wellington at Waterloo, looked like men inspired the moment they resolved on their plan of action. An honest resolution and the honest effort to carry it through gives strength.

The prodigal had formed a firm resolve in the greatest of all battles, and no sooner was the resolve made than the action began--he set off for home! He was quick to turn his thoughts into purpose, and his purpose into an accomplished fact. He had often repented before, in a way, and then repented of his repentance, but now he must burn his boats

and burn down all the bridges behind him and make return to the swine trough impossible.

When he said, "I have sinned!", he uttered the hardest words for a man to say. We will do everything else before we will unconditionally confess our sins. We will dodge them, deny them, try to justify them, seek to shift them to others, attempt to minimize them--we will do everything before we make an honest, frank confession of them without trying to adorn them or minimize them. Yet, the one condition of salvation is full, honest, sincere confession of our sins to God. This was the one absolutely necessary thing before the boy could return to his father. If he had gone back boasting of his sin, he would not have found a welcome. But when he came confessing all, in the spirit he did, he found a ready welcome, a full forgiveness, and a father's undying love.

The Bible says we are all sinners. Isaiah describes us, *From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment (Isa. 1:6).* The Apostle Paul tells us, *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Rom. 5:12).*

The Holy Book makes it very clear that sin has separated us from a holy God, and that we have been tried and found guilty. God is holy, righteous and pure, and cannot countenance sin. And we have chosen to break God's law defiantly and deliberately. Every one of us! And that sin of which we are guilty is a horrible disease with which we have become infected, and our communion and relationship with God is severed. Man cannot live correctly, purposefully, peacefully, and happily apart from God. Man must be brought back to God. He must find God. He must be reconciled to God, and that is why the Word of God says that the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth--He came to bring God and man back together again; but there is no way that a man can ever be reconciled to God and find forgiveness save in the wounds of Jesus Christ and on the condition of sincere repentance for sin.

Jesus said, *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* Repentance means that we are willing to renounce our sins, to give them up, and confession is the key that will unlock many a stubborn heart. It is the salve that will soften the hardened will. It will heal all manner of difficulty. I have seen homes about to be broken up that were saved because husband and wife both made an acknowledgment of the wrongs done to each other and, seeking forgiveness, they found once again their first love. Repentance leads to God.

It has been said that if you give a monkey a rock and throw him into deep water, he will hold to the rock and sink rather than turn it loose and swim. This is the picture of many. Rather than turn loose their evils and confess them, they will cling to them until they sink into the depths of hell rather than confess their sins to God and be cleansed and recreated in the image of Jesus Christ and become partakers of the new life that He alone can give.

The acceptance of this young man by his father was based on his willingness to make a confession of all to his father, and in that marvelous catharsis of cleansing, his future, his happiness, his conscience found relief, and in this he is the representative of the race, for we have all gone astray from God. Our sins stand like mountains between God and us. We can never undo the past. We can never cover the past with good deeds. We can never atone for the present. The only thing we can do is confess our sin in the spirit of humility and shame, but this is all that God requires. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9).*

Suppose that God demanded that we undo our sins before we could ever participate and accept His matchless, saving grace. This would be a barrier over which none of us could ever pass.

An old story is told of how a woman came to a minister to confess the sin of gossip. The minister required her to bring a basket of small seeds. He then sent her to the hills and told her to scatter them everywhere and then report to him. When she had done this and came and

told him, he told her to go back and gather all the seeds and bring them to him. She cried, "Why, it is impossible!" He said, "So it is with your sins; they cannot be undone, but God has not required that we undo them; He has required that we confess them, and forsake them."

What have you done with your sins? Only two things can be done: you may deny them or confess them. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13).* If we cover them, they shall hang their pall around our lives; they shall defeat us in the crisis of life. They shall finally be uncovered by the God who knows them and punishment shall be meted out and *the soul that sinneth, it shall die.* But, if we confess them and forsake them, we shall have mercy, forgiveness, and salvation.

The one condition of salvation is a full confession of our sins to God. The whole transformation of this young man's life lay in his willingness to make such a confession to his father. His peace of mind, his freedom from an accusing conscience, his purpose for living, his happiness, his future hung on his willingness to make that confession--a confession that could only have meaning if it came from a truly repentant, contrite heart. And in this, the prodigal becomes the representative of the race, for we have all gone astray from God and the only thing that any of us can do is to confess our sin in the spirit of humility and shame. How wonderful that that is all God requires for a complete forgiveness!

Men are moved to make such a confession under various influences. Pharaoh confessed to Moses that he had sinned against God, but the reason that he did it was not because he was grieved over his wrongdoing; he saw that he was beaten at his own game, that he was outmatched, that Egypt was in ruins because of his folly and that his very life was in danger. And because he was afraid of God, he sought to find deliverance from those awful plagues by pretending to be penitent. God accepted his word as true and gave him a chance to prove himself, but no sooner was the plague gone than he rebelled against God again. His confession was insincere and false, and

God knows the difference. Even though He knows when we are not true, He sometimes accepts our statements, that we may prove to ourselves that we are false.

How many men under the stress of great sorrow, needing desperately the intervening hand of God, have made promises and pledges, if only the sorrow would lift or the situation would change. And then, as soon as the circumstance began to look better, all of the promises and pledges are duly forgotten. How deceitfully some of us try to deal with God. We act as if He were a man, or as if He did not know our hearts. Many a man has faced death and cried mightily to God for deliverance, pledging all manner of good things for the future, and then when health returned, he never kept the promise.

I recall an incident in my very first pastorate of a young couple whose baby was sick unto death in the hospital. They did not attend our church, but because of their distress concerning their baby, they came and asked for our prayers. Making a profession of accepting Christ and promising that they would be faithful in their Christian testimony, they told us that the physicians had given up hope and that unless God acted in behalf of their baby, he would die. Our people prayed, and evidently it was consistent with the petitions of our people for God to answer that prayer affirmatively, and as a result, the baby began to recover before the morning came following the very evening the church had prayed. However, after the baby's recovery, we never saw the young couple again. They went right back into their former way of godless living, seemingly completely oblivious to what God had done for them. All their promises were insincere and hypocritical. Oh, there are so many whose pledge is in the same class with Pharaoh's, but God knows when a man is sincere and true, and when he is insincere and false.

Achan also said, "I have sinned against God," but it did not save his life because it was not true repentance. He was caught in his wrong. There was no possibility of escaping the penalty of it. He hid his stolen goods as long as he could and when he could not hide his booty any longer, it became necessary that he confess his

evil deed. But that is not the confession that God wants.

Many are the men who are sorry they have been caught in their sins. I am sure there is not a man in the penitentiary who is not sorry that he was caught in his sins. Usually, when men are caught in their sins, they are broken down from the shame of their deeds and they do shed tears, but almost always they are tears of self-pity. The reason for their shame and tears is that they are sorry that people have found them out, or that punishment is about to be administered. God not only knows when a man speaks the truth, but He knows what motivates a man to act as he does. He not only judges our words and actions, but our motives as well.

The prodigal made the case just as bad as it was. He did not come excusing his sins or claiming he had been a little wild. He admitted that his sin had been unnecessary and inexcusable, that his moral aberrations were bad beyond description. Not a vestige of his arrogancy was left. He had gone out to have *his way;* he came back surrendering *his way.* He went away demanding his rights; he came back surrendering his rights and confessing his wrongs. At first he said, "Give me," but at last he said, "Take me" and "Forgive me." He first thought he was his own master, but now he is willing to be a slave. He once thought he was as good as anybody, but now he is sure that he is worse than anybody.

How this sets forth the picture of a sinful man. In the days when the heart is hard and the mind is self-willed, when the drift is downhill, sin has no shame. God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and sane counsel are as nothing. They seem as a joke. But when realization comes and repentance fills the heart, the recollection of the past is a millstone about the neck.

When we ask what were the evidences of his sincerity, they were many: the long journey that needed to be made in order to get home; his submissive spirit; his full confession; the determination to throw himself utterly on his father's love and mercy; his feeling of unworthiness and unfitness to be a son in the home of such a wonderful father. The number grows with the thinking. There is no end to them, and they are so much like the feelings and passions

that sweep over the soul of every truly penitent one--willing to be the least if only the Father will forgive. How awful are the sins of the past! How just any punishment would be! This is not an overdrawn picture of the really penitent soul, and God knows when our confessions are genuine and when they are false.

When Peter denied the Lord at the time of the trial and had a moment to think, he was overwhelmed with the shame of his sin, and the Word of God says *he went out and wept bitterly.* There was no selfish motive behind that. He went into secrecy, we are told, and there he wept apart from the crowd, and his tears were bitter tears. Not a word is needed to prove he was in earnest. We do not have to prove to the public when we are sincere; God knows and that is enough. He sees us when we go alone and weep before Him for our wrongs. It matters little whether people ever hear it or not; God knows, and I am glad we are told that he wept.

I am unable to separate sin from weeping. How can a man come to see the shame of his life and not feel like weeping? How can a man realize the love of God for him and see how little he has regarded it without shedding tears? Peter wept over his sins. The prodigal wept because of his great wrong, and all truly penitent souls weep when they see their sins. Oh, they may not shed literal tears, but there is great indescribable anguish within.

It is through the tears of genuine repentance that men find God! *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation (II Cor. 7:10).* Our Lord said, *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:3).* Genuine repentance promises the complete forgiveness of God through our Lord Jesus Christ *(I John 1:9).* A little girl once said, "Repentance is being sorry enough to quit!" That is the true repentance for sin that finds forgiveness in the open wounds of our wonderful Saviour.

Chapter V

THE KISS OF GOD

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.

Having come to himself, and confessing his sin, he came to a decision. He did not say, "I will arise and reform," because that is not enough. He did not say, "I will arise and join the church." Joining the church is right and worthwhile, but joining the church is not enough. He did not say, "I will arise and go to work." That too, is good. Jesus said to the paralyzed man, *Arise, take up thy bed and walk.* Working is altogether right and proper, but the resolution of this pleasure-seeker is still more fundamental. He said, "I will arise and go to my father." I will never stop, he declares, until I come face to face with God. And having resolved to go to the father, he tells the plain truth about himself, and with the confession of his sin, he says, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants." Instead of the words "give me" now the prodigal says "make me." This is the very genius of the Christian faith--not give me, but make me.

The statue of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, stands by the western gate of the great Westminster Abbey in London, in marble, magnificently white, but as someone has well said, not any whiter than his life. This man who might have lived in luxury, but who dedicated himself to the high service of the poor, went about like a knight of old, redressing human wrongs. This man of whom it was said at his funeral, "It was his noble lot to clothe a nation in spontaneous mourning and sink into the grave

amid the benedictions of the poor." On this man's statue are carved two mighty monosyllables--LOVE-SERVE.

It was to this place the prodigal son at last had come, and it is in coming to this place that we find the real secret of successful living--not "give me" but "make me." Jesus Christ makes new men. *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new (II Cor. 5:17).*

"Have thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mould me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still."

--Adelaide A. Pollard

Adoniram Judson, known as the apostle of Burma, before his conversion, had gained a reputation because of his unusual brilliance. He graduated at the age of nineteen from Province College, now Brown University, as the valedictorian of his class. He was not only inordinately ambitious, he was also openly, vigorously, and viciously atheistic.

It was during the early years of the nineteenth century, while Judson was in college, that French infidelity swept over the nation. With only three or four exceptions, all the students at Yale University were avowed infidels, and preferred to call each other by the names of the leading infidels. Such names as Tom Paine and Voltaire were used instead of their own names. Province College did not escape this flood of skepticism.

In the class above that of Judson was a young man by the name of Ernest who was an exceptionally gifted, humorous, clever and outspoken atheist. An intimate friendship developed between these two keen-minded young men with the result that Judson also became a bold exponent of infidelity to the tragic sorrow of his father and mother who were both very devout Christians. When his father sought to argue with him, he quickly demonstrated his intellectual superiority because of his astuteness. But he had no answer to his mother's tears and solemn warnings concerning the ultimate end of the road he had then chosen.

Seeking adventure, he set out on horseback on a tour through several of the states. He joined a band of strolling players who were presenting plays from village to village, and lived, as he himself related later, "a wild, reckless life," following the path of the prodigal. Finally, leaving the troupe after a few years, he continued his trip, stopping on a certain historic night at a country inn. Apologetically, the landlord explained that only one room was vacant, and he would be obliged to put him next door to a young man who was extremely ill, in fact, quite probably dying. Judson assured the innkeeper that aside from a natural feeling of concern for anyone who might be ill, he would not be affected by the presence of the very sick man in the next room. And he stated, as a matter of fact, that death didn't mean anything to him. He retired, but sleep fled from him.

The partition between the two rooms was very thin and for long hours he listened to the groans of the dying man--groans of despair and agony. It came to Judson's mind that evidently the man in the next room was dying in terror, and he felt that perhaps he should go to his assistance, but upon further reflection, decided that he would not know what to say to help him. Then, suddenly, he himself became very afraid of going into the presence of a dying man, and then he felt a blush of shame steal over him and he immediately wondered what his late, unbelieving companions would think if they knew of his weakness, and above all, he wondered, what would witty, brilliant Ernest say if he knew.

As he tried to compose himself, the dreadful cries from the next room continued. He pulled the blankets over his head, but still he heard the awful sounds and shudders that indicated the last throes of life. Then, finally, everything became quiet in the next room.

After a sleepless night, with the coming of the dawn, Judson arose and inquired of the innkeeper concerning the young man next to him. The innkeeper replied, "He is dead." "Dead?" replied Judson, "Do you know who he was?" "Yes," the innkeeper answered, "he was a graduate of Province College, an excellent young fellow named Ernest."

Judson was overwhelmed to discover, upon further investigation, that it was his closest friend of college days. This young man, who had died the previous night in the adjoining room in such evident terror of death, was none other than his skeptical college colleague Ernest! For many hours the words "Dead--lost--lost," kept ringing in his ears. There was but one place that beckoned him.

Turning his horse's direction, he went home, and upon arriving he begged his father and mother to help him find a faith that would stand the test of disease, death, time and eternity. At last, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he took the resolution of the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my father." Within a few months, this young man surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. He realized that he needed a faith for the testings of life, a faith for the solemn, grim ordeal of death; a faith that would be adequate in time and for all eternity.

At this time of acute spiritual struggle, when his mind was filled with dark clouds of skepticism, and his soul enveloped with the black darkness of sin, the voice of God spoke, and as always, "there was light!" When he became sincerely repentant and submissive, he learned that *the voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty (Psa. 29:4),* abundantly able to save. He not only heard a voice, he saw a face surpassingly sweet, and fell in love with a person, the Son of God. Henceforth, the quenchless song of his heart was the love of Christ, His sufferings, His proffered forgiveness, His great, all-inclusive compassion, his constant abiding prayer. What a glorious thing it is to know the love of Christ in its depths, the sufferings of Christ in its height, the forgiveness of Christ in its breadth, the world-wide compassion of Christ in its length, and the ever-abiding presence of Christ.

And so we read, *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.* This verse sets forth the father's personal interest in the return of his boy. No artist will ever paint a more touching scene, no orator will ever stir his audience with a grander story, and no book will ever contain a more vital doctrine than is here portrayed.

There are four distinct things said about the father's personal interest: (1) *But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him.* This is significant. It was not an accident that he saw him, because long before he came home, the father was on the lookout for him. He saw him because he had been watching for him through all of the disappointing years. He had been hoping, watching, and waiting for his return. And although the son had forgotten the father, the father had never forgotten the son. This boy had gone out of his father's house, but he had never gone out of his father's heart. He had strayed far from his sight, but never had he strayed a moment from his love.

If ever the real facts about the sinner and God were set forth in picture or story, they are found here. God loves the man who has strayed, though He hates the sin that has caused him to stray. No man knows the borderline of God's love. We know that He loves us clear down and out and through the gates of eternity. I do not believe He ever ceases to love. As the father of this lad doubtless followed him to the gate and entreated him to return, even so, God follows us down to the last moment of conscious life. He must surely pity, even in hell, the souls who will not be saved.

This proves there is hope for the man or the woman whose life has been wasted or wrecked. There is hope for the worst sinner. The repentance of the vilest or the lowest is never a surprise to God. He sees the first impulse to return. He knows when the heart turns sick over the sins of life. He sees the first tear, the first longing for a better life, the first resolution to come back. Even the din of a noisy world will never be so great that the voice of a man hungering for God will be lost in it. God always hears the broken prayer of the penitent. *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear (Isa. 59:1).* The ear of God is quick to hear the first sound of the penitent who, through his tears, says, "I have sinned."

This statement about the father's seeing the son while he was yet a great way off, is a recommendation of the inexhaustible love of the father and his eternal vigilance.

Oh, how great was his anxiety. His eyes scanned the horizon, not with a look of disdain, but a look of solicitude and love, as the compassioned eyes of the lighthouse keeper sweep the rolling, stormy sea for some lonely vessel; or like the ear of the shepherd as he searches for his lost sheep. Undoubtedly, in the case of the father, the long delay only made his heart the more anxious. God is ever the seeker. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost. He is waiting for us, weeping over us, and sending His messengers to persuade us to come. I am sure, if the son had known how the father wept over him and how he longed for his coming, he would not have delayed as he did.

The heaviest heart over a fallen girl is not her own, but that of her mother or father. Sin affects the one who is guilty, but sin also affects those who love the sinner, and if that be true, and it is, God's love for us is the greatest love in the world, and so His suffering for sin is the deepest. When a man rebels against the Lord Jesus Christ, he offers hate in exchange for divine love, and all God's mercies are rejected, and man lifts up his clenched fist and defies his Maker. Oh, how great is the mercy of God! God will allow insult to be added to injury without expressing His anger, but rather He calls the louder and the Holy Spirit speaks the more definitely. Our Lord Jesus Christ knows all of your struggles, all of your disadvantages, but He never looks at you with a critic's eye or a bailiff's eye, but with the eyes of love. Never doubt the love of God!

(2) The second thing that is said about the father is, he *had compassion* on him. The word "compassion" is a Latin derivative. "Sympathy" is its Greek form. The word "com" means "with." The word "passion" means "to suffer"; thus the meaning of the term "compassion" is "to suffer with".

It is a common feeling in the secular world. Everyone has experienced it. When you bend over the body of a sick child, tossing in fever and delirium, with pain delineated in every twisting movement of the body, and you wish that you could take the suffering of that child you love into your own flesh, you are moved by compassion. When you sit by the

side of a wife who has been bereaved by the loss of her husband, or a husband by the loss of his wife, and you know that heart is aching and breaking, you know that in that mind there is turmoil unspeakable, with worry and fear because of an uncertain future, and when you long to share at least a small part of the pain of that burdened, bereft soul, you are moved with compassion.

Spiritually speaking, it is even more exalted. The Bible is filled with illustrations of compassion. Abraham is an example. Who can read Genesis 18 and once more hear the intercessory cries of that burning-hearted man without realizing the depth of his concern for Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses is another illustration of this beautiful grace. Forty wondrous days and nights he spent in communion with God, his heart aflame, his soul athrill, his life impassioned by that holy fellowship. And at last, carrying the tables of stone against his heart, he made his way down the mountainside, only to see his people profaning themselves in the mad worship of the golden calf. You recall how, in righteous fury, he broke the tables and how he sent the Levites into the camp to destroy three thousand of the ringleaders of this insurrection. Yet, the very next day, the same Moses was on his face before God crying, *Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written (Exod. 32:31-32).*

Jesus gave evidence of His compassion when He wept over the city of Jerusalem that the very next day was to nail Him to a Roman cross. When, at last, He hung on that terrible instrument of torture and death, He cried in behalf of those who had plied the crucificial hammers and put Him on the rack, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34).* The Word of God says, *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them...(Matt. 9:36).* Oh, how we need to experience something of the compassion of God! When you think of the multitudes without Christ, without hope, traveling on the road to eternal destruction, and seemingly heedless and unaware of their desperate plight, and when you yearn to

give your life in an effort to win them for Christ, you are motivated by compassion.

In our story we are told that the father saw him coming. Instead of its stirring up anger, it broke his heart with pity. Instead of feeling like administering justice, he felt rather like robbing himself of every comfort and bestowing them upon this unfortunate boy. This word "compassion" is the word that tells of God's love for us. This is the side of His nature that bids us take shelter under His protection. Compassion is what sent Jesus Christ to the cross. It was not sympathy alone, but compassion for man that led Him to devise a way whereby man might escape the consequences of sin and its awful punishment--eternal death. It put Christ under the burden with man and his sin. It made Him *suffer for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...(I Pet. 3:18).* It made Him willing *to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (II Cor. 5:21).* It made Him assume the guilt and bear the penalty, endure the pain; only that we might be delivered from it all.

Compassion will lead people to do strange things. During the Civil War a man was found asleep at his post and sentenced to be executed. Another man in the company made a hurried run to see President Lincoln and plead for his life. The president refused to grant the request, but the man continued his pleading, saying, "He is the worst enemy I have." President Lincoln said, "That is strange that you should come to me to plead for your worst enemy," and the petition was heard on the ground that it was an enemy rather than a friend for whom the man was interceding. Later, the man literally ran fifteen miles to be at the place of execution before it took place. At the moment he arrived, the man for whom he had pled was being led out before the firing squad. The condemned man turned and said to the warden, "You see that man? He is glad to see me executed." And at that precise moment, the man ran up with the pardon properly signed and gave it to the officer and the two men. With tears in their eyes, they walked away, with all their enmity gone, locked arm in arm.

Compassion is not mere sentiment, it is the most

fundamental of all the graces. In this case, it was not based on the mere fact that the boy was returning, but on the fact that he was returning in penitence. If there had not been willingness to confess the wrongs done, there would have been no compassion. There might have been pity, but no compassion. There might have been grief, but no compassion. There might even have been anger, but no compassion. Compassion made the heart of the father go out to receive and forgive. It even made the heart of the father devise a new standard of dealing with wrong. While reason would have sent him away, never to show his face again, compassion took him in as if he had never sinned, and such is the justification that is provided in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for any sinner who will embrace Him and own Him. His eternal promise is: *him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).*

(3) Another thing is said about the father, "he ran to meet him." When the prodigal was a great way off, the father ran to meet him. The son walked; the father ran. He did not wait for the son to come the whole way before he expressed his love. The lesson is clear. If God were to wait for us to come to meet Him, we would never come; but He runs to meet us in our coming. He says, *It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear (Isa. 65:24).* God's hurrying to meet us in our coming is the best part of salvation. We do not have to beg hard and long to be saved--far from it. Rather, the Father pleads for us and longs for us to find the glory of eternal life in Him. Do we have to come to God with explanations, and promises to be better, and assure Him of our hopes for a better life before He will forgive and receive us? This is far from the facts in the case. He follows us to the very depths in the hope of rescuing us. He listens for the very first whisper of a prayer in the hope that it is one of confession and a plea for mercy, that He might be quick to hear and to save. God is filled with anxiety about us! There has never been an hour since our first willful sin that He has not longed for us to repent and come to Him with the confession of it that He might forgive us and restore us to His love and fellowship.

(4) The last word that I would like to emphasize about the father is, he *fell on his neck, and kissed him.* Too full for words, he embraces him with overflowing love and he does what words will never be able to express. There is no definition of love that will ever be able to define it. It covers the faults of the past so completely that even the remembrance of them fails. No room for doubt is left. No criticism is mingled with the love. No suspicion remains and no dread of the future is allowed to weave its poisonous fabric into the texture of the cloak that covers us. Forgiveness is complete and is proven by the whole attitude of the father. No critic will ever find fault with it--such is our assurance from God. This is the kiss of His love. What a message God has sent to all men!

I had a family in my church during the war who received notice that one of their sons had been killed in action. They mourned his death for weeks and then one day a letter came from him. There had been a mistake. He was alive. He was a prisoner, but he was alive. Imagine, if you can, their unspeakable joy and the reception they gave him upon his return a few months later. To them, he had been dead, but now he was alive again.

And so it is that God sent His message of invitation. If men will but confess their sins, all shall be forgiven and the past gladly blotted out because of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. A man may go to his death in hell without the love of a single person, but no man will ever come to his death and go to hell without the love of God.

It was the father's love that drew the boy back from the far country. An invisible cord stretched itself across the intervening miles and held the heart of the wanderer, and in time drew so tenderly that the heart followed and he found himself back in the father's arms, receiving the kiss of forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the message of the Word of God. It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. Men do not come to God because they are afraid of hell, but because they love the God who loves them. The father's love is the basis of compassion, the basis of his forgiveness, the basis of salvation, the basis of the gift of

eternal life and the basis of the world of the redeemed, called heaven. The only thing that God requires at our hand, to compensate Him for His love, is our love--not our gifts, not our service--but our love. When we love Him, when we cast ourselves upon His mercy, when we confess we need Him, we receive from Him the kiss of His eternal forgiveness, and the gift of eternal life.

Chapter VI

FOUND, ALIVE, FORGIVEN, AND RESTORED

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. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes 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. And they began to be merry.

No artist will ever paint a more moving scene, no orator will ever thrill his audience with a story of greater grandeur, no book will ever contain a vital doctrine more graphically portrayed than in the words, *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.* We must remember that this is our Lord Jesus Christ's description of God the Father. This is one of the sublimest pictures given us of the mercy of our heavenly Father in receiving men, when in the confession of their sin they return from their wanderings. Forgiveness is as instantaneous as the kiss of love that was placed by the father upon the cheek of the prodigal. The prodigal was forgiven the moment he came back in sincere repentance. Forgiveness was not held pending the proof of a better life.

There are many false doctrines preached that have a tendency to cheapen this beautiful truth. One is that we must grow into favor with God; that we are not really saved

until we have broken from our sins and proved by our good lives that we have reformed, and that it is then that God blots out our iniquities. This makes forgiveness and salvation dependent upon our effort rather than upon the mercy of God. It gives no place for the intervention of God in our behalf. If we lived so worthily and so perfectly, then we would not need God. Our great need is for a God who will love us in our sin, and who, when we turn to Him with a penitent heart, will be quick to forgive us and to help us in our struggle for a better life.

The Word of God says, *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise castout (John 6:37).* Salvation is not piecemeal, forgiving just such sins as we are able to overcome, but leaving us still under the curse of those we are unable to conquer. God's act in forgiving us is definite. There was a moment when we were unsaved, and the next moment, by the miracle of faith, we are saved. Salvation is punctiliar; growth is linear. There can be no such thing as being partly saved and partly unsaved. We are wholly saved or wholly unsaved. We are either a child of God or the child of Satan. We are either for Christ or against Him. We are either hell-bound or heaven-bound.

It is a blessed thing to be able to point out the time and the place of conversion, but if you cannot do it, it does not necessarily prove that you are not saved. The knowledge of the fact is vastly more important than the knowledge of the particular time. It may matter little to us whether we can recall the details of the experience, but it does matter whether or not God knows about it. If God has no recollection of it, then we had better look into it ourselves.

The forgiveness of God is complete, not partial, not with reservations, but the whole, entire past is blotted out; not a sin is left. There is no such thing as being taken on probation. When our sins are blotted out, God does it wholeheartedly, as if He knew we would never commit another wrong in life.

Not a suspicion remained in the mind of the father of this boy. Never would he be tantalized in the future about his ugly past. The brother, with his jealous heart, might retain the picture of those wasted years and that record of shame, but not the father. To him, they were gone forever. This forgiveness represents the great heart of God shedding its compassionate love upon the wanderer who returns to Him. It is not a meager forgiveness. It is not meted out on the installment plan. God does not forgive that way. When a man comes to Him, as this boy came back to his father, the forgiveness will be as gracious as it was in this case.

There are those who tell us that the souls of men must first go into a purgatorial experience and suffer so much for their sins and then be set free, but this is far from the idea set forth in this parable, and it is far from the facts set forth in the Bible about God's forgiveness. For we read: *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you... (Jer. 29:13-14). If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9). In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14). Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:38). Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31).* Notice, there is not a single word about a purgatorial experience, about the necessity of suffering so much for sin before being set free. In many places, God is said to have blotted out our sins. We are promised that He will *cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19). As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us (Psa. 103:12).* And He will remember them no more, forever--these are the assurances that God gives us of His love and forgiveness.

Such a doctrine as purgatory makes light of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, because it claims that, while He suffered for our sins, we have to suffer for them over again, and after a little while He forgives us. This

would be like saying that we are not really forgiven in the first place, and we must endure all the pain and consequences just the same. Such forgiveness would mean very little to a lost soul, hungering after God. It is comforting to know that the father never held the son in suspense for one moment, but instantly, freely, completely, and forever forgave all the past and restored him to his place as a son.

It is also comforting to note that the father never waited to see whether he would hold out or not, to see whether he would make good, or whether he would repeat his former folly. Not one trial did he subject him to that he might prove his sincerity. Not a word about "holding out faithful to the end." Not one time did he make him promise to behave and to be peaceable, but with the whole heart he took him, and in his compassionate love, placed upon him the kiss of eternal forgiveness and brushed the ugly past into oblivion. If God waited for us to live righteous, worthy lives before He forgave us and saved us, we would never be saved. If the father had turned the son away until he had gone back to the far country to make good before he could return, there would be little hope that he would ever return. Oh, no, the forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ blots out forever the wrongs involved.

It is said of Martin Luther that during a long illness he seemed to see Satan coming to him with a great scroll on which was written all the sins of his life. He unrolled it and began to read. As he read, the great saint felt sick and weak, for he recognized that the things that were written there were all true. When he finished, Satan turned to him and said, "What have you to say now?" Luther's quick reply was, "What you have written here is all true, but you have failed to write down one fact, 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin.'" That states the case for us all. We have sinned, but there is complete forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mr. Moody told an interesting story about a visit he made to the Ohio State Prison. The warden had asked the governor to grant six pardons to the men who had made the best records of behavior. Six months of secret records were kept. The day arrived when the pardons were to be given.

The men were assembled in the chapel and the governor began to speak. The atmosphere was tense with the suspense. The men were as pale as death for they knew that six men would walk out free, but who would they be? As the program got under way, the chaplain interrupted and asked that the pardons be given without any further delay as the tension seemed almost more than could be endured.

The first name that was called was Reuben Johnson. As his name was called, he was invited to come forward and receive his pardon, but no one came. His name was called again, but there was no response. The chaplain, who knew all the men, looked right at the man and said, "Reuben, it's you. Come on and receive your pardon." But the man looked behind him, supposing there was some other man by the same name. A second time the chaplain pointed right into his face and said, "It is you, Reuben; you are the man." Slowly, he arose and went forward, half doubting that it could be true.

The men then rose and filed out of the room and Reuben Johnson fell into the usual place in the line as was his custom. Once again the chaplain called out to him, "Reuben, get out of line; you are no longer a convict; you are a free man, for you have been pardoned." There are many folk who act and think and feel much of the time that the forgiveness and pardon God gave them were not realities. Let it be said once and for all time, that when our sins are forgiven, they are all forgiven and forgiven for all time, and they shall not appear against us at the judgment. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).*

In our story we read, *The father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.* This illustrates not only a complete forgiveness on the part of God, but it demonstrates a complete restoration. He will restore him to a place and a name in his house--as in these words he plainly declares, for these are the ornaments, not of a slave, but of a son and a free man. All of them speak of restoration to his former place of dignity, respect and honor.

The father calls for the best robe. The best robe is

the "garment of salvation," or the "robe of righteousness," which God places upon everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same robe which in another parable is called the wedding garment. In Matthew 22 our Lord told about the man who appeared at the wedding feast without a wedding garment. *And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to his servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:12-14).*

This tells us of the destiny of those who do not have the robe of righteousness. Isaiah describes this robe of righteousness. He says, *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels (Isa. 61:10).*

Zechariah speaks of the robe of righteousness when he says, *And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment (Zech. 3:4).*

Then, in the great scene of the redeemed in Revelation 7 the Word of God says, *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands (Rev. 7:9).* This is the robe of white righteousness worn by the redeemed in Christ. In Revelation 19:8 we read concerning the church, *And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.* Without the covering of Christ's imputed righteousness, without the garment of His purity, all men would stand before God, helpless, hopeless, naked, self-condemned and eternally lost.

In the parable of the wedding garment, we have the

destiny of the self-righteous man who refuses the covering provided in the shed blood and the open wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. Over and over again in the fourth chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul speaks of God's imputing righteousness without works. *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference (Rom. 3:22).* We have no righteousness of our own, but claiming faith in Jesus Christ, we are clothed with His righteousness and God sees us covered with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Our filthy rags of self-righteousness could never provide a covering for our sins, but as Zechariah tells us, they are completely laid aside and the robe of righteousness, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is given us instead. This robe was woven on Calvary for the race of man out of the white warp of divine mercy in the blood-red wounds of the Redeemer's sacrifice. It is like Christ's own garment for which lots were cast--*without seam, woven from the top throughout*--and of which, when He was stripped by His executioners, He was significantly arrayed in the *scarlet robe*, emblematic of our crimson transgressions, which He bore. The robe of righteousness is for all and upon all them that believe.

Oh, how rich and unspeakably beautiful is the meaning of the father's placing the robe of complete restoration upon the prodigal son; and what the father did for the boy, God will do for you, if you will claim the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Saviour.

Then we read he *put a ring on his hand.* The ring was an emblem of an unending contract. What more fitting gift could a lover choose to express the strength and duration of his love to his bride than to put a ring on her hand? There being no end to it, it says in symbol, "I shall never cease to love you." And in thus putting the ring on his hand, the father expressed the love that had never died out of his heart for the long-absent boy. He had ceased to see him, but had never ceased to love him. The son no longer deserved the father's love, but he had it in spite of his own unworthiness. It was not only a token that his love for him had not died, it was a pledge that it never would die. It

reached its fingers of prophecy into the ugly, shameful past, and into the unborn and untried years to come, binding them into one bundle with a band of unbroken love. This is the pledge of God to all who come to Him on the merits of the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Pharaoh had his law signed by his deputy, he gave him his ring, that none should call his action into question. When Haman was hanged and Mordecai was made prime minister in his stead, the king took the ring from the hand of Haman and put it on the hand of Mordecai. It was the king's word. The acts of his representative were as the acts of the king when the official ring was on his hand, and so, in placing the ring on the hand of the returning boy, it was the ever-present reminder that he was there by the will and the authority of the father; that he was no intruder, and that his presence was not embarrassing, but an occasion for unceasing happiness. If anybody criticized or called to question his word or act, the son could show the ring on his hand, which was the proof of the father's approval. The giving of the ring in the life of the believer speaks of the sealing by God's spirit, whereof we are assured as by an earnest, of a larger inheritance reserved in heaven for us. *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13-14).* The ring on the boy's finger assured his acceptance.

Then, the father commanded, *put shoes on his feet.* The shoes correspond to the promise, *I will strengthen them in the Lord; and they shall walk up and down in his name (Zech. 10:12).* The penitent soul is equipped for holy obedience, having his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace *(Eph. 6:15).*

All the emblems used in the parable are but a reinforcement of the relationship between God and saved souls. God leaves absolutely no room for doubt as to His love, His joy, His forgiveness, His protection, and His guarantee of safety, but rather, He builds argument upon argument,

like a towering wall around the soul, to shut it in from the foes without.

And now the father says, *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. And they began to be merry.* He is alive to the father, where once he was dead to the father. This son is as one risen from the grave. The restoration of the boy was to this home what the salvation of a sinner is to God and His family. The man outside of Christ, away from God, is described in the Word of God as being *dead.* The Holy Book says, *The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead (Prov. 21:16). And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Eph. 5:14). And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col. 2:13). But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth (I Tim. 5:6).*

Every man without a vital, living relationship with Jesus Christ is in a state of spiritual death. The Word of God says, *the soul that sinneth, it shall die (Ezek. 18:20). For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).* When a man comes to Jesus Christ and exercises faith in Him, that man is resurrected from the dead. He is made alive. A spiritual resurrection takes place. That is what Jesus is speaking about when He said, *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).* That is what the Apostle Paul was speaking about when he said, *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Rom. 8:11). Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (II Cor. 5:17).*

No wonder there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth. When a man is saved, the

whole heaven begins to resound with rejoicing. We may pass by, but the hosts of heaven rejoice when even one is saved. It means another soul has escaped the clutches of Satan and the torments of hell. It means that one more has been enrolled in the Lamb's book of life and shall be under the protection of God in the final judgment. It means that influences that have been prostituted and debauched will be turned in the opposite direction and they shall be made constructive instead of destructive.

The father rejoiced because the son who was lost is found. What an awful thing it is to be lost. Our Lord Jesus said, *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).* The Apostle Paul said, *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (II Cor. 4:3, 4).*

Souls are described in the Bible as being blind, starved, naked, fallen, leprous, alien, prisoners, captives, and debtors. In this awful condition, the lost are unable to save themselves, and therefore need a divine Saviour. We have many things we may lose--our money, our prosperity, our health. It is a tragedy to lose our loved ones. We may lose our reputation, our influence, our character, our home, but the worst loss that can ever befall any of us is the loss of our soul.

Oh, that men could realize what it means to lose their souls! Look at the sheep lost from the fold, straying in the dark recesses of the wild mountains, exposed to the beasts of prey. Our Lord said that a man without Christ is like that lost sheep wandering from the fold of God. The lost are like the mariner whose vessel is lost upon the rocks, who cannot long survive. The man without Christ is like the leper with the disease spreading its vileness through his body, with no remedy and death hastening. Some folk have the idea that they are not lost until they come to the judgment bar of God, but I remind you that to be lost, to be out of relationship with Christ, to be unrelated to the world's Saviour, and not to be a partaker of His blessed redemption

is to be lost in life, lost in death, lost at the judgment bar of God, and lost for an endless eternity. It is loss, in the fullness of its totality. How sweet is this message, that our Lord Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save the lost.

Major Whittle tells the story of a Quaker by the name of Hartman who had a son enlisted as a soldier in the Civil War. After a terrible battle, the father started for the scene of the conflict to learn something about his son. The officer of the day told him that he had not answered to his name, and that there was every reason to believe that he was dead. This did not satisfy the old Quaker, so he started across the battlefields, looking for the one who was dearer to him than life itself. As night came on it became difficult to see. He stopped in the darkness to peer into the face of one after another. With a lantern he continued his search, but all to no avail. Suddenly, the wind, which was blowing a gale, extinguished his light, and he stood in the darkness, hardly knowing what to do, until his father's ingenuity, strength, and affection prompted him to call out his son's name. He stood and called into the darkness, "John Hartman, thy father calleth thee!" All about him he could hear the groans of the dying, and someone saying, "Oh, if that were only my father." He continued his cry with irresistible pathos and power until, in the distance, he heard his son's voice crying tremblingly, "Here, father." The old man made his way across the field saying, "Thank God, thank God!" Taking his son into his arms, he bore him to headquarters and nursed him back to health and strength again.

Are you lost? Are you under the condemnation of sin? Jesus, the matchless Saviour, is seeking to save you if you will let Him. Your salvation will be complete. You will know the forgiveness of God, the restoration of God, the renewal of God. It is only logical that in a glorious restoral such as this, they began to make merry. The occasion became a happy one, and such is the reception of God toward the penitent when he returns. Jesus said, *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:7).*

Chapter VII

THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS PRIG

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It is meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

In this remarkable parable of our Lord, we have three dramatic scenes: the penitent soul seeking forgiveness and restoration, as seen in the prodigal son; and God's love and mercy, as seen in the compassionate father. These two scenes represent great facts in real life, but we are now face to face with the last, and it is the one that offers no hope, no cheer, and no blessings. What an unspeakably sad ending this is to our story, but because it is irrevocably true, it must be told.

What was wrong with the elder brother? It is interesting to notice that the word "father" does not escape his

lips, and when he individually compares this treatment of himself with the treatment of his brother, he says, *but as soon as this thy son*--he does not say, "my brother." He had the spirit of a tyrant though he claimed to be an obedient son. The world was good as long as it contributed to his wealth and happiness, but when it showered its blessing upon another, everything was wrong. What a death-dealing sin is covetousness! All people were good as long as they conferred favors upon him and were willing to make him their own hero, but let the attention be turned for a moment to another and all was bad. How self-importance can make a man moody and unhappy. He is always thinking of his own excellencies and abilities, and renders himself unfit to enjoy the good bestowed on others, and he imagines that every blessing that comes to someone else is an insult to himself, and because of this, he becomes overly sensitive, irritable and envious. There is no more certain way to make ourselves miserable than to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. It isolates us from all those who are around us. May God deliver us from this idolatry of self, upon whose altar true nobleness and real happiness are immolated. How repulsive to others this egocentric spirit is.

Even in his wandering and sin, the younger brother was more loveable than he, and so it is ever with the selfish one. He is a nonconductor, a dead-end street. Everything must terminate in him. The electricity of love never passes through him, and in the end all loving hearts are driven from him. Thus he is not only most unhappy, but also useless. That was the spirit that characterized the elder brother. He was a complainer. He did not like what had been done. "He was angry and would not go in." His father had not been fair to him, in his thinking. He was being mistreated. As a matter of fact, the father had been fair with him, because the father had divided in fair proportions between the two sons, and he, too, had received the portion of goods that was to fall to him.

This is characteristic of emotional immaturity and another lack of spiritual growth. This horrible chronic complaining can get to be a habit, and there are always

those who are looking for slights and abuses, who are magnifying every little error, making mountains out of molehills, and being suspicious of everyone. There are those who are constantly looking for injuries. They feel the sting of words that are never spoken; they whine because they are not carried on downy pillows by all who meet them.

Then, too, this elder brother had the spirit of lack of appreciation. What his father had done for him was nothing. He felt his father owed it to him. He should have done more. He deserved more. He was blind to all the blessing that had come his way. This, of course, is typical of a complainer, but actually it is worse because its root is in the sin of sins--selfishness. The ungrateful person has no sympathy for others, no genuine compassion on those less fortunate, and so the elder brother comes only to find fault.

Notice the constant repetition of the word "I". *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.* His desire is to cast a shadow over that happy occasion. He wanted to ruin it. He would poison every servant about the place with his treachery, his covetousness, and his hypocritical self-righteousness. The music of the feast is, to him, the yell of the barbarian. The group of happy friends and sympathizers are but a mob of ruthless vagabonds.

The trouble is,the elder brother saw everything through colored glasses. The green glass makes everything green and the red makes everything red, so all things are to him as his evil spirit makes them. He was filled with jealousy. He could not rejoice because of this fiendish thing--jealousy.

What a ghastly sin this is. It begrudges every blessing that comes to another. It wants everything for itself. This evil breaks out in the most untimely ways and places. It eats at the heart like cancer. It turns life into a living hell. It is sometimes seen in the older man as he sees the young man come into a work that he was not able to do. It is sometimes seen when success comes to one who outstrips his competitor. Jealousy comes through inferior feelings, and is a direct result of our feeling that someone

else is going to take our place, either in significance, importance, or ability.

There is a way that jealousy can be cured, when we remember that blessings that go to others only enrich our own. You are not impoverished because others are enriched. One candle can light a hundred more without losing any of its brilliance. The sun can warm a hundred fields into life and beauty without slighting yours. The wind can turn a hundred windmills without losing a stroke at yours. Let it linger long in our hearts, that the blessings heaped upon others were not taken from our supply, and we are none the poorer because they are the richer. Learn to enjoy the successes, the blessings of others. Sincerely rejoice in the kind providence that has been so good to them.

Had the spirit of the elder brother been a part of the church, the Gospel would have perished. There would have been no churches for the saving of souls, for men would not have cared whether others were saved or lost. There would be no hospitals for the sick and suffering, for all would be glad to see the rest of the world crushed out forever. If this spirit ruled the race of men, this would be hell as really as the place prepared for the devil and his angels. No one would ever forgive a wrong, and no one would ever seek reconciliation. No one would ever make a contribution to the happiness of others. This is the spirit that questions the justice of God, and the fairness of His providence, and the love that He professes for men. This is the spirit that blames God for their misfortunes, that accuses Him of making them as they are. This is the spirit that criticizes every worthy effort that was ever made, that tells us when we send men and money to heathen lands to press the cause of Christ against the hearts of men, that it is all a waste. This is the spirit that accuses everyone of being insincere, which is a direct exposure of their own insincerity. This is the spirit that speaks of the work of God as a racket, that speaks depreciatingly of every noble sacrifice that is ever made for Jesus Christ.

This parable is so true to life, it is ugly, but it is not overdrawn. How many there are like this morally deformed youth, hanging suspicion after every man's name and after

every deed. It has the sting of the adder in it, and the bite of a serpent is as nothing compared to it. How poisoned the lives of men become when they are filled with rage when others are favored or blessed, or are constantly watching for injuries, insults and lack of appreciation. If the father had waited for the elder brother to give his kind and loving welcome to the prodigal before he had received him, he would have been waiting until now. Even so, if men wait for the approval of all before they press forward in the vision that God gives them, they would never move an inch. Criticism often comes from the most unexpected sources.

Think of a brother, angry because his own brother, who had been lost in the dregs of sin, had been rescued. The picture must be a reflection from hell. It is not in keeping with heaven. We are taught that there is rejoicing when a sinner returns. Not only does God rejoice, but the angels as well. Not only the heavenly hosts, but the redeemed of the earth. When the news of a sweeping revival comes to the ears of a man, if he be saved, he will rejoice and be glad, and when he hears of the conversion of a man who might have formerly been his worst enemy, he will be filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

This attitude of the elder brother is unreasonable and unthinkable, madness and insanity. It brings all the arts of hell, and condenses them into one sweeping conflagration that would consume the world's love, sympathy and compassion. It would close the gates of heaven against the wanderer's return to a father's love and protection. It would make a prison out of the whole world where there would never shine another ray of hope. It would enthrone the devil so completely that in all the nations the head would be taken from every man who lifted his voice in behalf of God's mercy and forgiveness. It would preach only one word: justice--justice, unmixed with clemency. If all we knew was the sovereign justice of a holy God, without the gracious mercy, love and forgiveness manifested in Jesus Christ, we would feel helpless and hopeless forever. When we read, *All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), There is none righteous, no, not one (Rom. 3:10),* on the basis of justice alone, the whole world would stand

condemned before God and all of our righteousness would be declared as *filthy rags.* If we received what we deserved, we would be irrevocably, irremediably, eternally lost.

How grateful we ought to be that the father, and not the prodigal's brother, is the representative of God. If the elder brother were a picture of God, then there would be absolutely no hope for you and for me. If the elder brother had been the picture of God, there would have been no compassion, no robe of righteousness, no ring of reconciliation, no joy; there would have been only death, damnation, and hell. How grateful we should be for this picture of God as the compassionate father, with his heart of love, standing in every pathway of life, pleading through his tears that the past can be forgiven, the ugly sins blotted out, and that a new life in Christ is possible. The father entreated the rebellious son to come in and enjoy and share in the feast. What a sharp contrast this is between justice and mercy, sin and righteousness, humanity and deity, heaven and hell. The elder son represents what man would do. The father represents what God will do through the merits of the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. No human can ever love like God: *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (I John 4:10).* If this elder son had never transgressed any law of his father until now, this is enough to drape all the glorious past with failure, shame and disgrace. This one deed would have covered all the years of faithfulness with a mantle of shame, and would have sent him back to his task with a feeling of guilt and a lack of self-respect.

The father had two sinning sons to reckon with. One sees his sins and is ashamed; the other is blind to his sins and tried to magnify his goodness. One is a confessed sinner; the other is a self-righteous prig. One comes with a bowed head, pleading mercy, throwing himself on the goodness of his father; the other comes with his head erect, demanding justice, and requiring that he shall determine what justice is. The first comes asking nothing but to be taken back; the second comes laying down terms and demanding all. The one brings joy and peace, like a beautiful spring morning; the other covers the sky with a black cloud

that sends the chilling wintry blasts. The first opens the very gates of heaven and the angels join in the glad refrain because the lost is found and the dead is alive. The other unchains the demons, and uncages the lions of wrath, hatred, and jealousy, and throws the whole scene into a storm of confusion and unpleasantness. This is what sin will do for every occasion, if it is allowed to reign.

What a glorious truth it is that our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners--sinners who admit they are sinners. The Apostle Paul said, *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (I Tim. 1:15).* If we claim any righteousness of our own, our blessed Lord has nothing for us. He said, *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32).* Our greatest recommendation to God Almighty is the fact that we admit our prodigality and cast ourselves in penitent surrender upon the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His unequivocating promise is *him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).*

Sin will never yield to reason. Because of his self-righteousness, the elder brother could not see himself as a needy sinner. No man has ever been reasoned out of his sins and reasoned back to God. True, God sends a challenge to all men, *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18).* But this has to do with the reasoning of the Holy Spirit which is something quite different from human reasoning. When the Holy Spirit does His work it is something beyond the mere use of argument. There is not an argument on earth that justifies the ways of sin, yet men will not give up sin by a process of reasoning. It is easy enough to be sensible about sin when life is not aflame with passion, but let the tempter blow his hot breath on us and all the reason and cold facts melt away in a moment.

It was impossible to persuade the elder son that he was absolutely wrong. And so it is, the strongest argument for righteousness and against wrong will not necessarily make a Christian. The mind may even be convinced, but if

the heart is not convicted, there is no hope. If men will not be moved by the compassion of the matchless Christ, they will certainly never be persuaded by the logic of men. There is little hope of salvation and a better life as long as there is love for the old life and pride in the past. Only when the glories of God put to shame the glories of men, will men be willing to exchange their glories for God's. Appeals made in the name of honor, justice, and peace are in vain until the compassion of the father melts the heart of the rebellious, stubborn son. Only the conviction of the Holy Spirit will bring men at last to the feet of Jesus Christ.

How blinding, and what an awful sin is the sin of unrighteousness. This elder brother committed that sin as much as did the prodigal. Selfishness is the fire that burns all the love out of the soul. Selfishness is a monster that has no eye for the beautiful, no ear for music, no appreciation for poetry, no sentiment. Selfishness is a lean-souled miser who would snatch a crust from the beggar and begrudge hospitality to a starving wanderer.

A familiar story is told of a father and a son who quarreled. The son was told to leave home. Years passed, and when the mother was dying, she called the husband to her bedside and asked that her son be sent for, but the father refused. The second day the request was repeated, and the father answered that he would send the message in the mother's name for the son to come, but the mother replied, "He will not come unless you invite him." The third day the petition was renewed and the father yielded. The word was sent to the son in a faraway state: "Mother is dying. Come home!" and it was signed by his father. Quickly as the speeding train could carry him to the side of his mother, the boy came. The moment arrived when he entered the room, and, while standing near the bed and holding his mother's hand, the father came and stood on the other side of the bed. The mother, holding her son's hand in her thin hand, reached out and took hold of her husband's hand, and then she joined father's and son's hands over her dying heart. It was not long after this that the end came, and of course, these two were reconciled.

This is the picture of how, over the dying heart of

the Lord Jesus Christ, the lost world and God are reconciled. It is here that the offended and the offender make peace. It is here that righteousness prevails over unrighteousness. It is here that mercy rises above justice. It is here that rebellion lays down its arms, and bends the knee, and humbles the heart in submission to the higher. It is here that the wall of partition is broken down and peace is made between God and man.

Though the elder son did not admit it, he was actually a great sinner. He was blinded by his own self-righteousness, and his name is legion. We are clearly shown that sin is not disposed of by denying it. The elder brother tried it. He insisted upon his innocency, but his very insistence became a channel of boiling hatred and rebellion. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13).* Sin has never been settled by stubbornly denying it, any more than facts are changed by disputing them. All the arguments in the world cannot change facts. The sun shines whether the blind man sees it and admits it or not. The deaf man may bitterly denounce all talk about the music of the birds and declare it is a thing of mere fancy or theory, but his denunciations do not disprove the facts. In like manner, the sinner may deny his sins. He may cover them with many decorations, but he cannot undo them nor disprove them. Facts will be the basis of judgment, and not arguments, or theory, or fancy, or denunciation. What are the facts in your case?

If you are honest, you must concede that the Scripture is absolutely right when it says *there is none righteous, no, not one.* Sin is not dismissed because it is not as bad as that of another. Here again the elder brother sets himself up beside his younger brother, and by the comparison he does not seem so bad because he felt himself to be more obedient, more loyal, and more faithful than his brother. He entirely forgot his own sin, but his sin was just as ugly, hateful, and undeserving of praise as that of his brother.

Can a liar claim purity because he is not a thief? Can a thief boast of his righteousness because he is not an adulterer? Can a reprobate deny his crimes because he has

not committed murder? It is true that some men have not gone as far in sin as some others, but they have all gone far enough to be counted guilty before God. *All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).* Do not measure your life by the imperfection of someone else, then conclude that you are innocent because you happen not to be as guilty as he is.

Two fields are sown with the same grain. One is destroyed by the wild growth of the weeds springing up and choking the grain; the other is destroyed by the fowls and the insects. In both cases the crop was lost. Shall one field boast that it is not as bad as the other? Two menacing evils may be different, but the result is the same.

Two children may die--one of typhoid fever, the other from the venomous bite of a rattlesnake. What matters the occasion of death? One is as dead as the other. Two men lose their souls in hell. One was an infidel of the deepest dye, and another a modest neighbor, not especially unkind, who cared nothing for his soul, nor for God, nor the claims of Christ upon his life. Now that both are lost in endless eternity, why should one boast that he was not as bold and open in his crime as the other?

Two sons are raised by the same father--one breaks away in early life from the beneficent environment of home and goes out to his ruin and shame; the other remains peaceable and obedient for awhile, but gradually becomes bitter and rebellious in spirit although he never leaves home. Both are very wrong. Both are unworthy of the father's gracious love. Both need to repent and confess their sins. Do not let a false measurement or a false standard or a false theory misdirect your thinking in this matter. The sin question is never settled by multiplying and magnifying goodness.

This elder son disclaimed all wrong, all disobedience, all shortcomings. He further emphasized his worth, his merit, his deserving faithfulness, but he was not the judge. The father was. Who is to be the judge of our records at the judgment bar of God? If the matter were left to us, no doubt we would engage in rationalizing our actions and our sins, but unfortunately, we will not be asked about what we think concerning the justice to be administered, or the penalty to

be assessed, or what public sentiment indicated in our case, nor do we have any say as to the basis upon which we are to be judged. We will not be judged as to whether we have been bad or good or more good than bad. All these are false notions concerning the judgment of God. These are not the questions to be decided at all. A level of life is not to be taken to be weighed in the balance, and if there appears more bad than good the soul is lost, but if more good than bad, it is saved. This is a popular idea, but it is not true to the divine revelation. There are those who point to deeds of mercy, charity and benevolence, to prove that they are entitled to eternal life. They even boast of having attended church regularly, and to have contributed in the approved manner, and they have even engaged in religious discussions; however, this is all sham. It is dodging the real issue; it is whistling to keep one's courage up; it is talking to one's self in an attempt to induce a passive false security.

Why not deal honestly with yourself, your sins, your wrongs? Goodness is not to be despised, but it is by no means the ground of our judgment before God. Our judgment before God is on the basis of our relationship to Jesus Christ, and without the robe of His righteousness, the ring of His reconciliation, the glorious new life He imparts, we are lost. Sin is not set aside by our criticisms and complaints of others. Finding fault with the guilty brother, the compassionate father, the whole program of God, does not add to the joy of the occasion nor contribute one mite to the peace of the home.

Was this elder brother happy when his brother was living a life of shame? And was he now provoked because his brother had seen his dreadful mistake and started life over again? Is he angry because the father has forgiven him in love and received him again? Is his heart so full of envy that there is no room for love? Is he so filled with selfishness that he feels there should be no room in his father's affection and blessing for his own brother?

How strange that he should find fault with his returning brother! However, this is all too often the case when a prodigal returns. There are always those who will ask,

"Will he hold out?" or "It is true he has returned, but it will not last long!" or "It won't last long. I doubt if he is sincere." There are always those who find fault with the father's justice. How glorious it was that nothing the elder brother said, in anyway affected the attitude of the father. The authority invested in his father was supreme and if the elder brother would not enter into the joy of the occasion, then certainly he was the loser. He could be urged and pressed to enjoy the welcome, but the responsibility to do so was his. This is the heart of the whole Gospel. It is also the secret of every lost soul going out to his ruin.

How sad that men exclude themselves from the feast that God spreads for them. They remain away. Sometimes they criticize God, question His justice, even heap their insults upon some returning prodigal as he straggles home in his rags and filth, back into the arms of his loving father. Thanks be to God, the father will not be changed by the poisoned words of the critics. The feast will go on, the joy will overflow, the past will be forgiven and forgotten. The reunion of the father and the son will be complete and unmarred.

There is a magnificent truth that might be easily overlooked; notice, the father steps into the place of the younger son and shifts all the responsibility to himself. He becomes the attorney of the prodigal, defending and protecting him against the merciless attack of the unsympathizing. This is the sublimest scene in the whole story. It has but one parallel, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ allowing Himself to be impaled upon the cross for the lost of the earth, making it possible for them to be saved from their sins by His own vicarious death. Here is the great doctrine of substitution in all its crowning glory.

Two records are hung side by side. The first is a record of the Holy One, a record of righteousness unmixed with imperfections, a record of purity unstained with evil, a record of virtue, of truth, of honesty, of merit, of worth, of honor. It is a record of good deeds, of help, of patience, of mercy, of sacrifice--such a record this world has never seen! It is a page torn from the life story of the One who came down from above. The other is a record of sin,

unrighteousness, imperfections, evil passions, broken promises, falsehood, dishonor, and disgrace. It is such a record as would shame any man. It is the story of words that should never have been said, of thoughts that should never have been allowed in the mind, of uncontrolled passions that should have been conquered and defeated. One is the record of Christ and the other is the record of man--any man, every man. They hang side by side.

Then our Lord Jesus Christ writes His name at the head of the long list of shameful things which are charged to us and writes our name over that long record of glorious things which belong to Him. Under our guilt, He goes to the cross, to death, and to the grave. In His name and upon His record we can approach God and are given an audience with the King of Heaven. We are admitted into that holy place and given eternal life, because we are clothed in the garments of his righteousness, and come in His name, and present His record of righteousness.

What the prodigal's father did for him is what Christ has done in the sublimer way for every man who returns to Him in utter surrender, embracing Him, owning Him, as the Lord of life and the Saviour of his soul. Christ answered every charge, received every blow, met every demand, and the sinner who has repented of sin finds himself under the sheltering wings of this great Defender. Our wonderful Lord takes our guilt, pays the penalty of our sin, dies in our place, and meets every demand of the broken law of a holy God. He is to us more than the father could ever be to the returning boy.

A few years ago, a great stock exposition was held in Fort Worth, Texas. In the barns where the fine animals were being housed, a fire broke out and acres of the finest stock of the state were burned to death. A man told how foolishly the horses had behaved. When the fire was discovered, he turned in the alarm and ran down to the stables, and with a sharp knife he cut the ropes of the horses and then he drove them into the street; but when they heard the sirens of the coming fire engines and the screams of the panic-stricken people, they turned and ran back into the stables, where they perished in the flames.

Men do that every day! Christ cuts the ropes. He makes deliverance and safety possible, but we refuse our liberty, choosing rather to perish. Nothing more could be done to save the horses because they were ignorant animals and they did not know any better. However, with men it is different; they are not ignorant concerning what Christ has done to rescue them from eternal death. If they go back to the flames, it cannot be said they did not know any better.

The father of the prodigal solved the difficulty facing his son by taking it upon himself and suffering in his place and receiving the insults from the elder brother, shifting all the blame to himself and allowing the guilty son to stand as one innocent of any crime. This is the identical situation when a penitent one comes to God confessing his sins. Christ becomes more than a spokesman and an attorney for him, He becomes the substitute for him, suffering in his place, answering to every demand of the broken law of God, and He meets the perfect justice of God's holiness by paying sin's penalty in full, not omitting a fraction of its just requirement!

In closing this little exposition on this greatly loved and familiar parable, one point of view, I feel, should be expressed. There are those who see in the elder brother the Christian (v. 31) who fails to forgive as he should, and who fails to rejoice as he should over the wanderer who, lured by "that love that will not let us go," at last returns! Certainly, there is a lesson in this; how quickly we should open our arms and offer forgiveness to those who stumble and fall and penitently return, remembering the admonition of Galatians 6:1, 2. The Amplified New Testament translates these verses: *Brethren, if any person is overtaken in misconduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual--who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit--should set him right and restore and reinstate him, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness, keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also. Bear (endure, carry) one another's burdens and troublesome moral faults, and in this way fulfill and observe perfectly the law of Christ, the Messiah, and complete what is lacking in (your obedience to it).*