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# THRICE LOST.

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BY

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## LUKE XV.

**M**AN is thrice lost! He is lost as a sheep! Lost like a piece of silver! And lost like a young man! That is, in other words, he is lost as to his soul; lost as to his body; and lost as to his spirit! He is *Lost*! LOST!! LOST!!!

We have in parable in Luke xv. the history of the way that God seeks and saves this thrice lost being; and all the wealth of love that is in Him wells up at every stage of His dealing with him. Happy the man who has to do with the God who is depicted here!

We do not get *redemption* in Luke xv., because it was not yet accomplished; but He who wrought redemption, there sets forth, in graphic, thrilling words, the results of it, in the activities of divine love. Grace is love in activity towards undeserving objects; and we get here the grace that seeks,—as the shepherd sought the lost sheep, and the woman the lost piece of silver; and the grace that receives,—as the father received the prodigal. Though redemption is not spoken of, it is the basis of all this; apart from redemption there could be no seeking of sinners, and no receiving them, and the sinner never seeks the Saviour until the Saviour has first sought him. Scripture asserts “There is none that understandeth, there is none that *seeketh* after God” (Rom. iii. 11).

Luke xiv.—xvi. form a section in themselves, and it is very complete. In ch. xiv. we have a man, who, having heard the Lord enunciate the principles of the kingdom, says, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Immediately the Lord in grace presents to that man the opportunity of eating bread there, in the parable of the great supper. That is all very well, but man will not come. Not only does he not seek God naturally, but he will not come when invited. And although mentally owning it is a good thing to eat bread there, he begins at once to make excuses. God has something better for men than anything down here, but man makes an excuse of the very blessings He has given for refusing His invitation.

A farm! Five yoke of oxen! A wife! Earthly temporal blessings! Good things in themselves, but used wrongly by fallen man to shut himself out of heavenly, eternal blessings. There was nothing wrong in any of these things: but man gets so much occupied, even with right things, that he refuses what is infinitely superior. Note, it is not bad things necessarily, that hinder man from reaching heaven; but good things do so. A solemn consideration! A man, if asked to-day,

#### WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO TO HEAVEN?

might say, Oh yes, I hope to go. That is, you say mentally, that it is a good place. But suppose we put another question and ask, Would you like to go now? Oh, no, you say, I don't want to go now! Well, when would you like to go? Oh, when I die. What does this mean? It means simply that you do not want to go to hell. Heaven is as unnatural to a man as hell, and an unrenewed man would be miserable in heaven, and if he could, would quickly get out again. Ah! my friends, if you knew what heaven was, it would be the supremest moment in your history if summoned to go there. A man made ready would

say : Oh yes, let me go at once ! But the natural man, while owning it is a good thing, will not give up anything for God's supper, nor for heaven. Many sell their souls for less than a farm, or a bale of merchandise, or five yoke of oxen, and are found eventually in hell, as the man of chapter xvi., 23.

Man's proclivities are all to earthly things ; he is an earth dweller ; and an earth dweller, if he continues to be such, is a man that will make his abode in hell, for man has forfeited earth and cannot possibly hold it. Yet, alas, "There is *none* that seeketh after God." Are you an exception to this ? By no means ! But you may say, Well, does God seek after man ? Yes, there is in Him the infinite

### GRACE THAT SEEKS.

Think of this ! It is, however, necessary to accept the truth in the end of Luke xiv. as to our natural condition, or we shall never consider ourselves suitable subjects for the grace set forth in the next chapter. Savourless salt ! that is just what we are. It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill, but men cast it out. What an awful picture of that which had savour at one time ! Alas for Judaism then ! Alas for Christendom now ! Alas for you, unless you own it ! Yet though savourless salt is a very unsavoury truth, it is a very salutary one.

Luke xv. gives us the bright, the other side of the picture. There were two classes that gathered round the Lord. The publicans and sinners on the one hand, the pharisees and scribes on the other. The first said as it were, We are savourless salt, we have nothing for God ; but has God nothing for us ? None have ever taken that place before God that He did not manifest His grace to them ! But the pharisees and scribes murmured at Him, and cast in His teeth as an epithet of opprobrium the saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." This witness is true, and

the Lord Jesus Christ, although in glory now, binds on His brow, as one of His greatest glories there, this very epithet,—This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them! Dear reader, do you know what it is to eat with Him?

If a man will give up nothing to get to heaven, God, in the Person of

THE SON, GIVES UP ALL TO SEEK AND SAVE  
THE SINNER,

and to bring him there. Let us look at it.

The Lord then relates this parable to them. It is one parable in three parts, and sets forth not only the grace that seeks, and the grace that receives sinners, but also the fact that the Trinity of the Persons of the Godhead are all active in their salvation. The sinner himself also is looked at in the three ways indicated above. In every part of the parable we find the two classes, viz.—the lost sheep, and the sheep that did not know themselves to be lost; the lost piece of silver, and those that were not lost; the lost prodigal son, and the respectable elder brother, who, in his own estimation, had never left his father. That which was lost, represented the publicans and sinners; and those that were not lost, the pharisees and scribes, who had never come down to own that they were savourless salt. Unless you learn that such is your case, you will never know the grace of God and the ministry of reconciliation.

If the triune God is occupied in the salvation of sinners, it proves that man is *lost*; and he is lost in the three ways, like the sheep, like the piece of silver, and like the young man who went away from his father. The sheep is a soul-being; it has body and soul, and is led by its senses. It has a soul, in common with a man, and the soul is the sensuous part of the creature. To the soul belongs the affections and desires. Old Isaac illustrates this when he said, "Make

me savoury meat, such as my soul loveth." The piece of silver has body only, but is valuable in itself, and bears the image of the reigning sovereign. A man has body, soul, and spirit. The spirit distinguishes him from the beast, and to it belongs the will and the intelligence. Now, it is worse to be lost as a *man* who has body, soul, and spirit, than as a piece of silver or as a sheep. In

### THE LOST SHEEP

eastern shepherding is in view, and such a thing was never known to an eastern shepherd as that a sheep should get back to the fold. The sheep were led and counted out in the morning, and at night they were penned up for fear of wild beasts. If the shepherd misses one sheep, he leaves the ninety and nine *in the wilderness*—not in the fold—and goes after the lost until he finds it. This is blessed: He never gives up once He is on the track, until He finds His object.

The shepherd seeks the missing sheep which had wandered away and away, nibbling some little tuft of green grass here and some tender young shoot of the furze-bush there, until it got so far away that it was impossible for it to come back. The shepherd follows its track, over the mountains, guided by a little bit of the fleece sticking on a thorn bush, and a few drops of blood on the ground, marking the track of waste and destruction the poor sheep had followed. So Christ, the blessed Saviour, came down from heaven, and as the Shepherd, follows the track of the lost sinner, that track of waste and destruction over the mountains of sin. On and on He goes, yea, He went down *under* the mountains of sin and put it all away, ere He could reach His object. The Shepherd seeks the sheep

### UNTIL HE FINDS IT!

Happy work that! and he lays hold of the sheep, two forelegs in one hand, and two hindlegs in the other,

and throws it across his shoulders. It was not, maybe, a very comfortable place for the sheep, but it was a secure one. Many a kick and many a struggle and many a bleat the silly sheep may give, to try and get on to its feet again; but it is on the shoulders of Omnipotent strength, and the Shepherd means to bring it safely home. And it is as secure on His shoulders as though already there. But where does He take it? Does He take it back to the fold? Ah, no! It is not mere restitution. Not the gospel of relief only. It is excess! The sheep had lost the fold, but he gains the Shepherd's home; he is secure for heaven, secure for eternity! Far better that, than restoration to an earthly fold.

Yet it is natural to man to live on earth: it is not natural to him to go to heaven. Never a man appeared in heaven till Christ went there. You may say Enoch and Elijah were there. Well, we don't know exactly where they were taken; but Christ said, "I go to prepare a place for you," and that place was not prepared for man until *He* went there.

Joy!

As surely as the sheep is on the shepherd's shoulders, it is brought safely home with joy. The joy of the sheep is not mentioned, but the shepherd calling together his friends and his neighbours says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." The joy is the joy of Christ the Shepherd, and of heaven in fellowship with Him, and it is over one sinner that repenteth! Think of all heaven being occupied with and rejoicing over a man who would give up nothing for heaven! Nothing for God! But see the other side. The blessed Son of God gave up everything for His lost sheep! Now we come to

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER.

Here the sinner is not looked at as a soul-being like the sheep, but as that which has body only. Yet he

is lost equally as to his body, and as to his soul. His soul should have been subject to his spirit, and his desires towards God, his body being for His glory. But fallen, his spirit becomes subject to his soul; his desires go out to everything but God, and his body is dishonoured as the vessel of sin. The piece of silver just dropped out of the purse, its very inertia carrying it farther and farther away, until it rolls into the dust in some far corner of the house, and there it lies equally lost with the sheep. Nor may it be hoped that it will ever find its way back to the purse whence it fell. But the woman lights a candle, and sweeps the house diligently; she is earnest, and interested in her work. Now this woman with the light figures the Holy Spirit, the second Person of the Godhead, who, Christ's work being accomplished, comes down into this world to bring to light the lost sinner. Nor is this far-fetched, for the woman in Scripture is an unseen power in a house; she is not the prominent person there, she does not say "I this," "I that," but "My husband, &c."; she keeps in the background herself, and puts her husband forward. It is, however, soon known upon entering a house if there is a woman in it, although she may not be seen. Here the woman with a light, this unseen power, searches for the lost piece of silver

#### UNTIL SHE FINDS IT.

She is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew xiii. we have a woman without a light, who hid leaven in the meal. It is still a spirit, but all is dark and hidden there. It is a wicked spirit. Perhaps you do not believe in this unseen power. You may say, I believe in nothing I cannot see! This is a mistake, my friend. You believe in steam, yet you never saw steam; what you see is vapour, *i.e.*, steam mixed with atmospheric air. If you look at the gauge glass of a boiler, the space above the water, where the real steam

is, just looks like a vacuum, but the engineer knows this is filled with steam. Again, you never saw wind, but you have seen its effects, and you believe in it. You may have seen the path of a cyclone, or a tornado, which lays everything in its devastating track level with the ground, whether the trees of the bush, or the houses of a town. So you may have seen the effects of the Holy Spirit's work, though this is not seen in devastation, but the opposite. Have you never seen a blasphemer converted? Have you never seen a neighbour, your own brother even, converted? And do you not believe in the Holy Spirit? No dead soul is wrought upon, no lost sinner is brought to light, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now there is inherent value in the piece of silver, and it is stamped with the image of the reigning sovereign. So the sinner is valuable in himself to God even as to his body, which was made in the image of God, as His representative here, though a defaced and fallen representative now. We must turn now to Christ for the image of God. The woman seeks the lost piece of silver until she finds it, and she finds it when a ray from the light is reflected back from some abraded portion of the silver, an abrasion sustained in the fall! So the Holy Spirit is seeking now to bring to light the sinner. The moment when a soul is wrought upon and recognises the effect of the fall, is the moment when the light of the candle falls upon it. The sweeping and search is continued until they are found, and this goes on in the house. Then, when found, there is joy again, but it is much more specific here than in the first case, "joy in the presence of the angels." Not the joy in heaven generally, so much as the joy of the triune God specially.

### IT IS GOD'S JOY!

You cannot have a more wonderful thought than that. He, the blessed God, who does not need you to make

Him happy, comes down to seek you,—and we read of the joy, not of the sheep or the piece of silver, but the joy of God, when the one or the other is found. If it is as a *sheep*, a soul-being, alive in sins, led on and on like a poor drunkard ; or if as a piece of silver, a being dead in sins, although intrinsically valuable, the very inertia of his being carrying it farther and farther away,—the joy of God is alike over both.

In these two parts of the parable we have had the grace that seeks the lost, while in the third we have

### THE GRACE THAT RECEIVES.

This last is as active and positive in its endowment of the returning prodigal, and shows that all is of grace from first to last.

Now a man has body, soul, and spirit. The spirit is the highest part of his being, the seat of the will and the intelligence. The soul is the seat of the affections and desires, which should have been subject to the spirit ; but in the fall things were reversed, and the spirit became subject to the soul, which desires other things, and the subservient spirit plans for the fulfilment of them. For what have we here in the parable of the prodigal ? A man who plans deliberately his withdrawal from the Father—unlike the lost sheep who was led astray by its lusts, or the lost piece of silver which tumbled out of the purse : he did not love the Father, nor the restraints of His house ; he wanted to enjoy his portion of goods without the Father, and in a few days he gathers all together and takes his journey into a far country, and there dissipated his property, living in debauchery. But at the first step over the Father's threshold he was morally at as great a distance as when he was wallowing in the sensualism and the iniquity of the far country. At once his back was towards the Father's house, and his face was towards the far-off country and the hell that lies beyond. He had exercised his

will, had used his intelligence, had laid his plans, and had carried them out. It is

### LOST MAN

we have here. He had lifted up his eyes to heaven, as a man is constituted so to lift them, but not, alas ! to learn God's will. The difference between a man and a beast is that a beast looks downward, while man was made to look upward ; but think of a man looking upward to God like the prodigal, in order to plan his departure from Him, or only in order to defy Him. "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him ?" man says in the pride of his being, dressed in a little brief authority, like Pharaoh of old. Or like the nineteenth-century man who, deliberately refusing His grace, will presently lift up his eyes in hell being in torment.

This young man reached the far country, and there, away from the Father, wasted his substance in riotous living, and he found the old adage true, which runs—

" 'Tis a very good world that we live in,  
To lend, or to spend, or to give in."

But an end comes to all that, for a mighty famine arises in that land, and he begins to be in want. God often sweeps the scene with the besom of destruction in order to bring a man to himself, like this prodigal : and then he finds the other couplet true—

" But to beg, or to borrow, or get a man's own,  
'Tis the very worst world that ever was known."

Having spent all, he now tries to get satisfaction by going farther away still, and joins himself to a citizen of that country. Now he is in a far worse case, for not only has he lost all he had, but is himself now a bondsman, and finds the rigour of the rule of his master. He finds it a land where no man gave! though it is but swine's food he seeks now. Dear friend, have you ever found this world a place where no man gives ?

Not one single desire can be fully satisfied here! So the prodigal found it! All his desires were thwarted and frustrated! "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." The light of the candle had fallen upon the piece of silver; the Holy Spirit had wrought in the heart, the man was born again, had newborn desires, but realized his perilous condition—he was convicted. I perish! he cries. Thus the first effect of being born again is to make a man miserable, to bring a soul to this, "I perish with hunger." People think, if they were only born again, they would be happy; but this does not follow at once. Now every one must come to himself at some time or other. Dear friend, *you* must come to yourself either in time or in eternity. The prodigal came to himself in time, and obtained all we find here.

In the next chapter we have one who came to himself *in eternity*. Alas! it was too late then! He got not so much as a drop of cold water to cool his parched tongue! That was the elder son—the scribes and pharisees.

But if you have already come to yourself, I believe I am commissioned of God to present to you all that this young man obtained from his father. Notice his progress from this time on. First, he made

### A GOOD RESOLUTION.

"I will arise and go to my father." People say, "The way to hell is paved with good resolutions," and there is truth in this. The Old Testament is the record of four thousand years' broken vows, broken resolutions! Look at a drunkard too for a particular instance; he makes resolution after resolution, and then goes on as before till that man's way to hell is paved.

He drinks heavily overnight, and awakes with a bad headache, resolving never again to touch drink. No sooner does he leave his house, even before he is over the pavement, than he is met by a boon companion, who says, "Come along, Jim, and have a hair of the dog that bit you yesterday!" All his good resolutions are at once dashed to the ground, and he follows like a sheep led to the slaughter.

But the difference in the prodigal's case was, that having been convicted of sin by the Spirit, he made his resolution in the Spirit's power, and carried it out. He said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants." But he had not yet gauged the Father's love. The lad said, I will go; I will make a confession; I will prefer my request, a humble one. But while carrying out his resolution, and making his confession, he could not possibly say his prayer in the presence of the Father's love. Now, if the Spirit of God has touched you, you will make the resolution this man did, and carry it out; "He arose and went to his Father." May God help you to do this.

#### NOW HE WAS CONVERTED.

Conversion means to be completely turned round. His face now was towards his Father, and his back to the far-off country. The Spirit of God has brought him to a sense of his condition and completely turned him round. A man may be converted more than once—Peter certainly was—but he cannot be born again more than once, nor will that new birth be finally ineffectual. Between the far country and the place where he met his Father there was plenty of time for the exercises that souls go through,—the backing and filling, the doubting and fearing, the hoping and rejoicing; now a momentary gleam of

hope and a few steps forward ; now as many backward in despondency, as he looks at his filthy condition.

But when he was a great way off the Father saw him. Indeed He had never lost sight of him.

### THE FATHER'S HEART

and the Father's eyes had followed him in all his wanderings. And now that his true condition was forced upon him, He had compassion upon him—that is, He felt for and suffered with him, as though He said, Poor fellow ! see there he comes ! Not only so, but He ran to meet him also ! We do not hear a word of the prodigal running toward the Father, and had it depended upon him, he would have been a long time in shortening the distance that separated them, if ever he accomplished it. But the Father ran to meet him ; having compassion upon him. And this is God the Father's way, bridging at once the whole moral distance between Himself and the returning prodigal. Christ's work of redemption and seeking is done ; the Spirit's work based upon it, and as sent of Him, has begun in the soul,—and in these two we have the grace that seeks ; and now here we have the Father's work, which sets forth the grace that receives.

I was once asked to preach on board a Queensland steamer. I did not expect to be asked, so I had not thought about it, but reflecting that it was likely that there was a prodigal on board the steamer I spoke on Luke xv. There *was* a prodigal right before me, and he was weeping all the time ; what touched him most was the thought that the Father had never lost sight of him. I believe that the Lord spoke to him that day. This thought has melted many a stout heart before and since then.

The prodigal had all the rags of the far country upon him ; but the Father fell upon his neck, and the warm, glowing kiss of affection was imprinted on his cheek.

This kiss is

### THE KISS OF RECONCILIATION.

Can not you feel it now, believer? Does it not thrill you now? Well do I remember when it was imprinted upon my cheek! God sees the returned prodigal in all the value of the work of Christ. He sees also the work of the Holy Spirit in him. He can kiss him. From this point we get the ministry of reconciliation all the way along as applied to the prodigal. It was not that God was angry, and needed to be reconciled. He needed what suited Himself and has it now in Christ, in whom He sees the prodigal. But in the power of that kiss, I now come into the joy of this, and am reconciled to Him. When the prodigal felt his Father's kiss, then his heart was fully reconciled, all enmity is dismissed, for the man who was at enmity is gone, and he is assured there is no want of reconciliation in the Father.

Then goodbye to his fears, his doubts, which were all driven to the winds by that kiss! and even to his proposed prayer to be as one of the hired servants. How could he say this with the Father upon his neck and kissing him! Fathers kiss their sons, not their servants; the Father needs the service of sons, not of hirelings; and there are thousand thousands who minister to Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand who bow before Him. He has plenty of servants, and so now He says to His servants, "Bring forth

### THE BEST ROBE

and put it on him." If the elder son had been there (which he was not) he would have said, "Stop! stop!! There is some mistake here. Do not put that robe on him! Look at him!" Had it been so, the Father would have taken no notice, save to say emphatically Put it on HIM! And on him it went. THE best robe!

Now, God clothed all His works with suitable robes. The angels He clothed with strength, the earth with

verdure. Satan was the sum of beauty in heaven. Man was His masterpiece and His image down here ; but he fell, and God sought him, having in reserve a better robe for him, as thus returning, than any before were ever clad in. Bring it forth ! God says, and he who was in rags and in ruin now stands before God in righteousness, conscious that all questions have been settled, and in the recognition that he is before God in Another, and well satisfied to have it so. Reconciliation is thus manifest in righteousness. All that man is as man has for ever passed away from before God, and the state of the returned prodigal is that of one who ascribes the glory of it all to Christ. He alone is worthy. Thus within and without all is Christ.

The prodigal is now kissed and clothed ; but that is not enough for God, though the prodigal might think it so, and there is a tendency in every heart to limit the grace of God in the reception and investment of a prodigal. God is doing good to sinners, and He must have a fuller manifestation of what is in His heart than this ; so He says further, "Put a ring on his hand." This, I believe, sets forth

#### DIVINE APPROVAL.

When Ahasuerus would show to wicked Haman a mark of his royal approval, he took his ring from his hand and gave it to him. Afterwards Mordecai was clothed in royal apparel, set upon the king's horse, with the crown royal upon his head, and it was proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." Then the ring that Haman had worn was given to Mordecai, who was to seal with it any writing that he pleased ; and that which was written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse. All the administration of the kingdom was thus put into his hands, and he was made the second man in the empire. This was the suggestion of Haman, supposing that he himself was the man.

Joseph also had the king's ring given to him, and was made to ride in the second chariot, and all were summoned to "bow the knee" before him. That, I believe, is what God does for us, whom He has taken from the lowest depths of iniquity. He has linked us with Him who is His Son, in relationship with Himself, and in the administration of the kingdom, raising us thus to the very highest place of creature dignity.

I think it is clear that in this sense "The Church of the first-born ones" (Heb. xii., 23) will occupy the place that Satan falls from. For Satan was God's masterpiece, as we find in Ezek. xxviii., where it is said of him, under the figure of the king of Tyrus: "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty . . . every precious stone was thy covering. . . . Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth, and I have set thee so." His was the highest place of all created beings. But he falls by successive stages from his high place, until he is engulfed in the lake of fire! This is the end of beings who stand before God on the ground of responsibility.

On the other hand, an earthly, fallen, thrice-lost creature, taken up in grace, is invested with all that divine love can furnish him with, all that makes him suited to heaven, and is eventually raised to heaven. We shall have the very highest creature-place in connection with Him who is the Son of God, and this as the outcome of God's counsels of love.

Further, the Father says: "Put shoes on his feet!" This indicates figuratively that he was to be made

#### PERFECTLY AT HOME

in the Father's presence. When Moses—observer of God's ways—turned aside to see the great sight why the bush that burned with fire was not consumed, he heard a voice from the midst of the bush saying, "Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy

ground." Moses, blessed man! was not at home in the presence of Jehovah! He had to take off his shoes.

So Joshua, when he went to the Angel with his sword drawn in his hand, saying, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" heard eventually, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy!" Joshua! was not at home in the presence of the Captain of Jehovah's host. He had to put off his shoe! But the Father will have the returned prodigal at home in His presence. He will put shoes on his feet. He must be made at home in His presence. He does not want him to be uncomfortable there. It is not mere deliverance and patronage. A slave thus liberated and patronised would feel perfectly miserable at the table of his patron; he would rather be a servant still; and this had been the prodigal's thought, but it was not the Father's. All that was necessary to put him at his ease is furnished him, and he is thus prepared to feast with his Father. The feast is spread in the Father's house, which, in Luke, is moral and present. We are put into the enjoyment of it by the Spirit sent from the Father. Then comes

#### THE FEAST.

"Bring hither the fatted calf and kill it" This is in the death of Christ as a peace-offering—that which furnishes food and joy for God and man. This, like the robe, had been in reserve; and though more plainly set forth in Old Testament type in the sacrifice of the peace-offering, is now brought into full light. Man finds his portion in the One in whom God had ever found His delight, and Who had always delighted with the sons of men.

"And let us eat and be merry." God has His portion and we have ours, though this merry-making is chiefly the Father's,—“This MY son was lost, and is found,” though others share in it; there is, however,

but one Father, and there is no joy like His. "And they began to be merry." When does this merriment end? There has been no cessation of it! There never will be! The returning prodigal is the occasion of all this heavenly, divine eternal joy! Wonderful God! The blessed (happy) God indeed!

They make merry in heaven: the Father's joy is there; it is in

### THE FATHER'S HOUSE.

But they make merry on earth also, if they hear what is going on in heaven. To this end we need the Spirit's power, that we may listen daily at His gates, and be led up into eternal life. When in Victoria, at some distance west of Melbourne, where there is a difference of about twenty minutes in latitude, I was standing in a telegraph office talking with the lady operator. The instrument kept up a continuous rattle, in what to me was an unintelligible jargon, but which was all plain to her. Presently the noise ceased and there came a regular beat—tick, tick, tick—like the ticking of a clock. "What is that?" I asked. "That is the ticking of the Melbourne town clock," she replied. "How can that be?" I said. She explained: "It is necessary that all the telegraph offices in the colony should keep Melbourne time, so at one o'clock all messages cease, and the wire is switched on to the pendulum of the Melbourne Town Hall clock, and the tick of that clock is heard in every telegraph office in the colony." "Oh then," I said, "you hear what is going on at headquarters once a day at least?" "Yes," she replied. "And what about heaven?" I asked, for she was a Christian. And may we not ask, What about heaven? Do we hear from the Father's house every day? Once a day is not enough for us, unless it is all the day long. In such a case a Christian is raised above all the difficulties of this scene; he is sensibly embraced in the arms

of the God of love, as his Father and his God, and makes merry in fellowship with that Father.

To sum up, we may notice that the prodigal, who was born again and converted before he reached the Father, entered gradually into the realisation of the following seven blessings afterwards, viz. :—1. The Father's heart, which he now becomes conscious was ever over him. 2. The kiss of reconciliation. 3. The robe, indicating that the reconciliation is on the ground of righteousness. 4. The ring of divine approval. 5. The shoes, making him at home in the divine presence. 6. The feast of the fatted calf. 7. The Father's house. God invests the sinner with all that was in His heart for him with all that suits *Himself*. The sinner would say Hold!—*enough!* at any stage; but God says, "Give him this, give him that, give him all that has been reserved for him from eternity;" and it is to satisfy His own heart, and to make him meet for heaven and Himself. Now a word as to

#### THE ELDER BROTHER.

He was in the end in just the same state of soul as the prodigal when he left the Father's house. The prodigal wanted his fling without his Father—so did the elder brother. I think, said a man to me once, that the Father treated that young man (the elder brother) very badly. Indeed, said I, did it ever occur to you that the Father entreated him to come in? But the merrymaking of the Father in grace was not to the mind of a pharisee, as the very statement above quoted proved. For what did the elder son say? He did not care the snap of a finger for his Father or His joy. All he wanted was to surround himself with his own companions, and enjoy himself with them, and so he answers: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I

might make merry with *my* friends." He wanted to make merry with *his* friends and shut the Father out! This is evident from the use of that big I and MY and ME. It was himself he had before him, and not the Father; and this was exactly the state of the prodigal at the first.

Now, dear reader, all that, in the parable the Father had for the prodigal, God has for *you*, if you adopt the prodigal's resolution and come to the Father. Accept it all! Say not at any stage, Hold! enough! Go on! go on! If you have been touched by the Holy Spirit, arise and go to the Father. He awaits you; receive the kiss, the robe, the ring, the shoes, partake of the fatted calf, the merriment of the Father's house, which never has ceased and never shall cease. That merrymaking enjoyed by the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in company with the angels and all those who, having been thrice lost are now more than thrice saved,—and will be enjoyed by them for ever.

Thus is the thrice-lost sinner invested! Thus is he brought to God. On the other hand, the one who never recognises himself as lost is divested of all that would enable him to enjoy himself apart from God, and lifts up his eyes in hell being in torment!

G. J. S.

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