

Luke 15:20 (W.G.B.) 51626

Things New and Old: Volume 31, But When He Was Yet a Great Way Off, His Father Saw Him (15:20)

Luke 15:20.

How every word in this wondrous parable brings out the fullness and freeness of grace. Nor is it to be wondered at, for God is the God of all grace, and the Father of mercies. So that we might expect the unfolding of God's heart, by the Son of His bosom, which this parable is, to abound and overflow with grace. How that father's heart yearned over that son! How God's heart yearns over poor sinners, little they think it. How can they when law is deeply imbedded in all our hearts? That is, that God will be to us in accordance with what we are to Him. Grace acts from itself. It is not called forth by any worthiness in its object. God finds the motive for His grace in His own heart. How that father's heart went out towards that son, and welcomed the first approach to a return! How God's heart goes out towards the poor sinner, and fosters and strengthens, then welcomes the faintest drawings towards Himself!

What riches of grace are contained in that single expression, "a great way off, his father saw him." How it speaks of God being on the look out, as it were, for the sinner's approach. Not the trembling sinner on the look out for a kindly glance of His eye, a favorable moment to draw nigh, but the other way round altogether; God on the look out for the first motion in a sinner's heart towards Himself. With what interest He watches the effect of all His agents: the famine, the treatment of the "citizen," of the rest ("and no man gave unto him"), of the want, &c. If such His interest in His "banished," if He thus "devises means that his banished be not expelled from him" (2 Sam. 14:14); small wonder that He should, as it were, "make merry and be glad," when He gets the sinner home; or that His Son should inform us, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

But not only did he see him a great way off, but he "had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." Dear unsaved reader, I would ask you, What do you think fills the heart of God towards sinners, towards you? Is it anger, or is it pity? True, He is "angry with the wicked every day." He hates his sins, but nothing but pity fills His heart towards the poor slaves of sin and Satan.

And what is this "running and falling on his neck, and kissing him," intended to represent? The willingness, the alacrity of God to receive and to forgive the repentant sinner.

What a moment, what a meeting for both, the father and the son, God and the sinner, whilst all heaven rings again with responsive joy! May it be yours to cause heaven and the heart of God this joy, and to receive for yourself this welcome, ere you lay this paper down, dear unsaved reader, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

"BUT THE FATHER SAID,"

(Ver. 22.) All hung on that. What would his father say? It was of comparatively little importance what the son said, or what place he would ask for. Very right that he should confess his sins for "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Confession is the evidence of repentance.

But the son could not finish what he had intended to say. How could he? For his father had seen him when he was yet a great way off; had had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. Was that the way servants were hired? No, he must let his father have his own way, and give in accordance with the dictates of his own heart. "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him," &c.

And what is all this intended to represent? The way that God receives sinners.

The Pharisees and scribes had murmured against the Blessed Lord, saying, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." And so the Son, of God's bosom, the declarer of the Father, draws this picture to show not only that God receives sinners, but the way in which He does it. For grace asks for nothing and gives all, and the best of everything too.

Dear reader, do you believe that God is thus waiting to receive sinners, and to bless them? That He has everything in readiness for them? Even the calf fatted for the feast; joys ready prepared.

On the rugged Yorkshire coast stood a little cottage, inhabited by a poor widow. Her only child, a son, the hope of her old age for comfort and support, had forsaken her years ago. In his hard-heartedness he had followed his own will, and run away to sea. But that mother's heart never gave him up. Many a prayer had gone up from her lonely bed, on windy nights, as she lay awake, and listened for his hand upon the latch; for she never locked her door, but left it on the latch, "for," said she, "he may come back some night, and I would not have him find my door closed against him. And if he only comes back to die, I'll gladly nurse him."

One night, she heard a hand upon the latch, and a footstep on the floor below. "Charlie, is that you?" she said. "Yes, mother, I've come home to die. Will you have me?" "Yes, Charlie, and welcome."

That mother's love is but a faint reflection of God's yearning over sinners. Will you test it, dear reader?

"Bring forth," and "Bring Hither."n({vi 25611-25612}Luke 15:22, 23.) "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him," the father had said. The son was still outside. He needed fitness for his father's house. Though his kiss had betokened forgiveness, that in itself did not constitute him fit for the house. Grace could meet him in his rags, but grace would fit him for the house as well.

Not only did Christ die for our sins, but God “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” And not only is this the righteousness which fits the thief on the cross for paradise, but it is the very same for the apostle Paul, with all his years of untiring devotedness. “That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” (Phil. 3:9.) The believer says at the end of his course,

But when thus clad, with the token of His Father’s eternal love on his hand, and shoes on his feet, a standing in grace, the next command is, “Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it.” This shows that his position is changed. “Bring forth” shows that he was outside. “Bring hither” that he is inside. And this takes place now. The believer receives this position now; not when he dies. He is “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.”

Is the language of your soul, dear reader, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?” If a believer, it should be so.

God give us to know our blessings and position better, and to enjoy them more,

“LET US EAT AND BE MERRY.”

(Ver. 23.) How clearly this brings out God’s joy in saving sinners. Of Jerusalem it is said, “The Lord thy God.... will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing.” (Zeph. 3:17.) It is not that Jerusalem would rejoice, that is true; but it is God’s joy. So in the parable, the recovered son rejoices undoubtedly; but it is the Father’s joy that is spoken of. “Let its.... be merry.” The son’s happiness is so complete that scripture says no more about him; it can add no more. It is the Father’s satisfaction, the Father’s joy, that is spoken of. “Let us be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” It is the Savior’s full vindication. The accusation of the Pharisees and scribes had been, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Ver. 2.) The Lord shows that this is how God deals with sinners. He makes them at home with Himself. He brings them to share His joys. It is not the sinner introduced into these joys when he gets to heaven, but the joys of heaven brought down to the sinner now, by the Holy Ghost; or the saved sinner carried up to participate in the joys of heaven now. For it says, “They began to be merry.” The joy will go on in heaven for all eternity, surely. But it has commenced now. It is the same joy which we shall share there; we shall enter into it more fully then, but God will not,

May your soul and mine, dear fellow believer, know more of this joy, enter into it more fully. Not only God’s joy in saving ourselves, but to be sharers of His joy in saving others also, to be abettors of His joy.

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