

Sermons and Addresses

BY

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The Lost Sheep.
The Lost Piece of Silver.
The Prodigal Son.

*A Sermon preached at Bethesda Chapel, Great George Street, Bristol,
on Sunday Evening, July 4th, 1897.*

Luke xv.

WE will read the whole chapter, and on some of the verses we will meditate, as the Lord may help us. "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." This is particularly to be noticed. Two classes especially sought to hear the Lord Jesus—"sinners," that is, notorious sinners, who lived in gross immorality, and who came because they wanted something for their souls; and "publicans," those officers who were noted for defrauding those with whom they had to do. These two classes, particularly, came by reason of their spiritual wants. "And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.'" These individuals were self-righteous persons, who had, generally speaking, a very high opinion of themselves, who thought themselves far better than others, and who looked down upon other classes of persons, especially on the publicans and on those who were known as notorious sinners. On this account, because they were self-righteous, they murmured. If they had really been God-fearing persons, they would have rejoiced that these "publicans and sinners" sought to hear the Lord Jesus, because there was the prospect of their being benefited through hearing Him.

But self-righteousness is connected with pride and high-mindedness, and so they murmured and said, "This man receiveth sinners." So He does! And if He did not, we should all be lost. Salvation would not be possible if the Lord Jesus Christ did not "receive sinners," because all human beings since Adam and Eve belong to a fallen race, all were unfit to save themselves, all were not in a state of getting to Heaven, except they obtained a Substitute on their account, and that Substitute was the Lord Jesus Christ. And instead of rejoicing that the Lord Jesus received sinners, the Scribes and Pharisees murmured. They were dissatisfied, whereas they ought to have been grateful. For all their good opinions about themselves, they needed a Saviour as much as these publicans.

“And He spake this parable unto them.” How came it that the Lord Jesus spake this parable to them? Because He knew what was passing in their hearts, and in what state they were. “He spake this parable unto them, saying, ‘What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing, and when he cometh home he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, “Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost”’” By this shepherd is represented our Lord Jesus Christ, the “Great Shepherd of the sheep,” the “Chief Shepherd;” and the love which He has to poor sinners is set forth in the parable. When we, who are believers in Christ, look at ourselves, we are compelled to say, “This is just my case; my Lord Jesus Christ has been looking after me in the past of my life, in a variety of ways, seeking me, caring about my soul, and leaving me not until He has found me.” Is not this the case with every one of us? We had cared nothing about God, we went our own way, we sought to please ourselves, to gratify ourselves, one in this way, another in that way; one in “the pride of life,” another in “the lust of the eyes,” and another in “the lust of the flesh.” But in whatever way we sought joy and happiness, it was in a way which was contrary to the mind of God; and the Lord Jesus Christ knocked at our heart’s door in a variety of ways, by this trial, by that trial; by this disappointment, by that disappointment; by this loss, by that loss; and so He sought after us, and gave us not up until He had brought us to Himself.

Further, the one lost sheep is here particularly dwelt on, not that the others were not also loved and cared for; but so great is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ to any and every poor sinner who as yet does not know Him, that He goes on seeking, seeking, seeking, till He has found him. O, how precious! Now there may be two or three, peradventure even more, here present regarding whom this is the case. I have reason to believe that it is God’s especial purpose that I should bring this chapter before some such. It is most remarkable that while I have preached tens of thousands of times within the last seventy-one years, in the case of this *particular chapter*, which is so often spoken about, and from which so frequently texts are taken, *I have never once before in my life preached!* I call it a very remarkable circumstance. Yesterday, again and again I bowed my knees before the Lord to teach me what subject I should speak about this evening. I had no subject laid on my heart. Even during the night, while I was awake, I asked God to guide and direct me. I had no text when I got up. Then, before the meeting this morning, I again and again asked God to show use on what I should preach tonight.

No text yet, and this afternoon again I cried to God to teach me, when all at once this passage was impressed upon my mind.

Now, I reckon this to be a remarkable circumstance. The many scores of times that I have read this portion, at least one hundred and fifty times, since my conversion, without having been led to speak upon it, is an indication in my own mind that God means to knock, by the power of His Spirit, at the heart of someone or other here present. Now, let such who as yet know not the Lord Jesus Christ say to themselves, "Is Mr. Müller directed to this chapter for my sake?" "Does it not become me to pay attention?" "Is not the Lord by His Spirit knocking at my heart, through the instrumentality of this chapter, and is it not high time that I surrender my heart to Him, that I own that I am a sinner, that I acknowledge before God in prayer that I deserve nothing but punishment, and that I began to put my trust alone in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, because He fulfilled the commandments which I have broken times without number, and bore the punishment in order that I might escape?" Thus those here present, who as yet know not the Lord Jesus is going after you, my fellow-sinner, in order to save you. That is the reason. If He wished that you should be destroyed, He would let you alone and care nothing at all about you; but this is the very reverse regarding the Lord Jesus. He delights to save sinners, and, therefore, He goes after them until He finds them. All those here present who know the Lord know how He went after them till He found them.

Then see the tenderness of this precious Saviour. "When He hath found it He layeth it on His shoulders." Just think what this figure means. That the sheep might not be troubled or hurt by walking, that all the danger in the way might count as nothing He carries the sheep. O, the love of this Saviour! The tenderness of His heart is brought afresh before us in this parable. Then, further, He does this rejoicing, *rejoicing*. Though the sinner may not care about his sin, yet not merely does the Saviour seek after the sinner; but when He finally finds him, and brings him to himself, He does so rejoicing, because it is the delight of His heart to make us happy, and He knows that while we are going our own way, we cannot possibly be happy.

"And when he cometh home he calleth together his friends and neighbours saying unto them, 'Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost.' 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." Here we find something particularly to be noticed. "Joy in heaven," on the part of the redeemed, on the part of the holy, unfallen angels; all the hosts in heaven rejoicing when they hear that another soul has been won for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, any here present who are as yet strangers to this great salvation, will you not give joy to Jesus by surrendering your heart to God? Will you not give joy in heaven to the elect angels, the holy angels, and to the redeemed by yielding your heart to the Lord Jesus?

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost.’ Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

“And He said, ‘A certain man had two sons, 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’” (that is, his possession) “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. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want; and he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him.”” This younger son asked his father to give him the property which, in the case of the death of the parent, was coining to him; to give it to him while he (the father) was yet living. Now, the father was not obliged to do this, but he did it, showing real, true love to the son.

But how did the son treat him, as soon as he was in possession? Without waiting any length of time, only a few days, after he had come into the possession of the property, “he gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.” Going away from his father, from his *kind* father, from his *loving* father. And *that* is just the way in which we, in our unconverted state, treat God. We do not abide in His presence. We cannot bear His presence, because naturally we are wicked; we go our own way; we wish to please ourselves; we wish to do the things which are hateful to God. And because of this *we leave Him*, and go from Him.

Then, after he had left his father, and gone into a far country, this son, having now no one to look after him, to care about him, and to admonish him, “wasted his substance with riotous living,” just carrying out his natural evil propensities to the utmost. “And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want.” Now, the description which is given here brings before us, spiritually, the real, true condition—the miserable, wretched condition—in which we are as long as we are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner, who is not a believer is to the very utmost in spiritual want; he has no Father in

heaven, he has no Saviour, he has no Holy Spirit dwelling in him, and he is not admonished by the Word of God, because he cares nothing at all about that Word, he has no fellowship with the children of God. All this is wanting, and, therefore, he is really and truly spiritually in want, though he may have plenty of money, plenty of worldly friends, plenty of the possessions of this life.

“And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country.” Now, what does the citizen of that country do for him? He does not say, “O, my friend, I have much feeling for you; come to my house and live with me, and share with me everything that I have; I will try to make you as comfortable as I can!” Nothing of the kind. The description here given brings before us the wretchedness, the misery, the real, true wretchedness and misery we feel as long as we are without Christ. The citizen sends him into his fields to feed swine. Naturally, irrespective of his being an Israelite, a most wretched occupation this, “to feed swine;” but to him, who was born an Israelite, it was doubly and trebly and tenfold a trial. Therefore, I say, this brings before us the wretchedness and misery in which the sinner is as long as he is without Christ. Then, further, we read, “He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat.” This, the most miserable and wretched food, the food of unclean animals, this he would have gladly have eaten, if he could have had it, but he could not. “No man gave unto him.”

Now comes the turning point. “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!’” “When he came to himself;” that is, pondered his ways. He saw then what had befallen him, in consequence of the manner in which he had been acting towards his father by leaving him and wasting his property in the way he had. “He came to himself.” Now, I affectionately ask all here present, “Have we individually, without an exception, come to ourselves?” By the grace of God, I have come to myself, and by the grace of God, there are many scores here present who have come to themselves; they have pondered their ways, they have seen that they are sinners; they have found out that if they continued in the way in which they were going on, it would have ended in misery and wretchedness for ever and ever. And if that is not to be the case, we all must come to ourselves, and the sooner we do so the better. Therefore, again I ask affectionately this question, “Have we individually come to ourselves? Have we individually found out the evil way in which we are going on? And that, if we continue in this state, it must end in perdition, in wretchedness and misery to the end?” “When he came to himself, he said, ‘How many hired servants of my fathers have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise

and go to my father, and will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."'"

Now, to some such decision we have to come; we have not merely to ponder and consider our ways, but we have to decide to forsake them, to come to God, to humble ourselves before Him, to own that we are sinners, that we deserve nothing but punishment, and then to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation. This is the way in which we have to act, and this is the way which will bring blessing to the soul. "I will arise," he says, "and go to my father." So must we say to ourselves. And he not merely purposed to do it, but he actually did do it. That is the special point we have to notice in the 10th verse, "And he arose, and came to his father." He did not say, "I am shabbily dressed, I am so wretchedly miserable, I am ashamed to go to my father." Nothing of the sort. "My sins have been too great, and too many, and too varied; therefore, I am ashamed to go to him." No. Conscious of all this in himself, "he arose, and came to his father."

Thus we have actually to turn to God, and the result of it will be blessedness, eternal blessedness and happiness; and the reception that we shall meet with on the part of our Father, our Heavenly Father, will be of the most loving, tender character. "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 brings before us the heart of our Heavenly Father, for if an earthly father would act in that way, by reason of his love to a son, O, how much more abundantly would this be true regarding our Heavenly Father in His love to us poor sinners. The father did not say, "This, my son, has given me great sorrow, great trouble, I have wept many times on his account. Now, I will let him who has given me such sorrow come to me; I will not go a step to meet him." Nothing of the kind. "When he saw him yet a great way off, he had compassion on him, and ran." O, think of this! How it brings before us the heart of God. "And fell on his neck, and kissed him." Before the son who had given him such sorrow, such pain, and had so deeply wounded him, had uttered a single word, he fell on his neck, and kissed him. O, how precious! All this brings before us our Heavenly Father; all these figures tell us of what we have in God, and what we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

"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 band, 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.” Not a single word of reproof, but love, love, love, the manifestation of love. And nothing but a manifestation of love is what we meet with from our Heavenly Father in reference to ourselves. That is what we are taught by this parable, and in the figures which are used. “The father said to his servants, ‘Bring forth the best robe.’” The best robe that was to be had in the house, that was in his possession—that was put on him. Now, we have also, spiritually, the best robe put on us—“The Robe of Righteousness.” All they who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, from the moment that they do so, are no more looked on by God as they are in themselves, but as they are in Christ, for He in our room and stead, fulfilled the law of God, and this becomes “the best robe” that we could have. The filthy rags of our own righteousness are removed, and this best robe, the comeliness of Christ, the perfection of Jesus, the justification we have through faith in Him, is put on us.

“And put a ring on his hand.” Gave it to him; indicating *what we receive* as believers in Christ. We obtain the Spirit. Thus are we regenerated, born again, become the children of God, and, as such, the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. O, what precious things are given to us by coming to the Lord Jesus Christ! “And shoes on his feet.” When we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and return spiritually to our Heavenly Father, we obtain not merely full forgiveness for all our numberless transgressions, but we also obtain the help that we require to walk to the praise, and honour, and glory of God, which is set forth by the shoes on our feet, for the way is rough and difficult. But we obtain help from God to be able to walk in it.

“And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us be merry.” This also is particularly to be noticed—the joy that we can give to God Himself. Though He is the Almighty God, and the Infinitely Wise One, yet we can give joy even to Him, by turning from our evil ways and going back to Him. And this is set forth by the fatted calf being killed, and all eating and making merry, rejoicing, because the lost son had been brought back. “For this, my son, was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found; and they began to be merry.” Now, this very evening, some can thus give great joy to God by surrendering their hearts to Him, by owning that they are sinners, that they deserve nothing but punishment, and by putting their trust now, simply and solely, in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Thus they can give joy to the heart of God, and joy to the heart of the Lord Jesus, and joy to the Spirit; and joy to the holy angels and the redeemed in glory.

“Now, his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music 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 entreated him.’ Precious! Precious! O, what a heart is found in *Him*! For this again sets forth the heart of God! The tenderness, the loveliness, the kindness, on the part of this earthly father represents to us, in figure, what we, who are believers in Christ, have obtained in God. The brother was a self-righteous person, and behaved shamefully. Because his brother had lived in open sin, he considered himself far superior to him, and hated him—for it is nothing but a real, true hatred that is manifested here. “And as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing,” and on receiving the answer as to what it meant, he was angry. Just manifesting the same kind of spirit as the prophet Jonah, when Nineveh not being destroyed, as he wished it, was angry, was displeased with God.

And now hear how the father dealt with this elder son. Because he was angry, on account of the manner in which his brother had been received, “He would not go in.” O, what a sad state of heart! It shows to us what it is to be in a self-righteous condition. It is one of the most pernicious things we could fall into. “Therefore came his father out, and entreated him!” O, the loveliness such a father! “And he answering said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment.’” He was, indeed, at this very moment transgressing his father’s commandment, because his father wished him to go in, and he would not! “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.” In other words, “There is a different state of things, between thee and thy brother; thy brother was considered as being dead, as being lost, and that we should never see him again, but ‘thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine,’ I am not merely willing to give to thee a kid, but I am willing to give thee ever so much. If thou hadst asked me, thou wouldst have known how willing I was to give thee a kid.”

“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.” That is the reason why they were so joyous, because it was considered he was dead, that he was lost. Now, what will be the end of our meditation? The Holy Spirit has been knocking at the hearts of some, and the Lord Jesus Christ is standing before them now, and says, “Will you not let me in? I am your friend, I love you tenderly, I wish to do you good, and to make

you very, very happy, not merely for a time, but for eternity, if you will only have me, if you will only let me come into your heart!” Now, what is your reply?

Any here present who have not the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in them, will you not surrender your heart to the Lord? O, come! Come! Come to Him! Come to Him! I know, from my own experience, the wretchedness and misery that are got by walking in the ways of this world. I sought happiness in the things of this life; but I never found it! Never! Never! All that I met with was disappointment and increased guilt on the conscience; but at last, in the riches of the grace of God, I found Jesus, and immediately I became a happy young man, and I have now been a happy man seventy-one years and eight months. And this happiness which I have received through faith in the Lord Jesus, through surrendering my heart to Him, I do not wish to keep to myself; I delight that others might have the same blessing, and, therefore, I speak as I do. Be sure of this, all who know not Jesus, that real, true happiness, can only be found through faith in Christ. This world cannot give it. Nothing that we can have in this present world can afford us real, true, lasting happiness. That is alone to be found through faith in Christ. Therefore, let no one put it off to the last, but come to Jesus now!