

Sermon Outlines

The Parable of the Loving Father

“Father, I have sinned . . . But the Father said”
(Luke 15:21, 22)

This should be called “The Parable of the Loving Father” rather than “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” It has also been referred to as “The Pearl of Parables.”

In Scripture, the words “I have sinned” are said by eight different men. Four times they are said without reality: - by Pharaoh, Balaam, Saul, Judas. Four times they are said in sincerity: - by Job, Achan, David, the Prodigal Son. Of these, the last instance is the most notable for us, since we are told the steps to and from the utterance of the phrase. We are given the history of a sin, with the experience of the sinner made very clear.

I. Downward - Seven Steps

1. *Restraint.* Life is bright with every opportunity, but the son of the home was under law, the rules of the household. Not license (abuse of law) but liberty (regulated freedom). So man and God - freedom within bounds (Gen. 3:2, 3).
2. *Restlessness.* Son not satisfied - chafed - hemmed in - wanted to get away from father and home - could not find enjoyment. So man, in natural state, incapable of finding fullest enjoyment in God.
3. *Request.* Emphasis on the word “me”. Wanted goods, not presence or love of father. Unlawful because not yet due, but was determined on freedom. So man wants to be let alone, to be “free.”
4. *Responsibility.* Granted - now own master - free to do as he liked. So sinful nature - self will - independence of God. “Portion” - endowments of life. Sin makes man want to be lord of himself and his possessions.
5. *Recklessness.* Off at once - waste - riotous living - no thought of responsibilities - freedom only consideration - has his “fling” - sin always wastes - living for self is waste.
6. *Retribution.* Famine - “harmony with environment” a principle of moral law. Tendency of sin or virtue to gather corresponding surroundings. Fortune goes, famine comes. Life within and circumstances without agree.
7. *Reproach.* Menial task for Jew to be swineherd, especially when employed by “citizen” of another country. No friend near - everyone left when all was gone. Isolation of sinner - homelessness. Degradation of sinner - emptiness.

Germ of Sin - self will - emptiness.

Growth of Sin - gradual, not precipitate.

Goal of Sin - separation from God.

II. Upward - Seven Steps

1. *Reflection.* “Came to himself” - so before he was “beside himself” (madness of heart). “Said” - of thought (talking to himself) and first thought was of his father and the servants of the household. First step up is always realization of others than self.
2. *Recollection.* Past comes before him - the conditions he abandoned so carelessly. Servants better off than himself now. Second step is letting memory work.

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3. *Realization*. "I perish" - no blame to any but self. Third step is to stop blaming others.
4. *Resolution*. "I will arise" - "I will do" - "I will say." Conversion is "turning around" and starting off in the opposite direction.
5. *Repentance*. Means entire turning. Forsaking of sin necessary to prove reality.
6. *Restoration*. Cf. attitudes in meeting: the son "held himself afar" but the father "ran". No rebuke - "not 'forgiven' but 'loved'" as far as expression was concerned. Reconciliation included robe, ring, shoes - all showing sonship.
7. *Rejoicing*. Love requited brings joy. So joy in heaven and in the heart of God over "one sinner that repenteth."

Grace of God - Longing and watching love - quick reconciliation - full welcome - entire restoration.

Greatness of God - Reconciliation possible because of God's character and Christ's atonement.

Glory to God - New life to prodigal, but better still if he had never wandered. Life of elder brother more exemplary - "ever with me" and "all that I have is thing" - so in this story there is no premium on sin. But elder brother should have emulated father in attitude to returning prodigal.

Where are we? Going down, or going up? If down, why farther? God says, Return! Shall we not say, "Behold we come?"

Conclusion

The four characteristics of the prodigal's return as found in this chapter (Luke 15) were:

1. Conviction - "came to himself" (v. 17).
2. Confession - "I have sinned" (v. 18).
3. Contrition - "no more worthy" (v. 19).
4. Conversion - "he arose and came" (v. 20).

. . . . *W.H. Griffith Thomas, D.D.*