

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

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“He Came To Himself”

By Everett Hardin

The parable of the Prodigal son has, by common consent, come to be regarded as the pearl of all the parables of Jesus — the heart of the gospel of Christ. In this parable the deplorable condition of a man away from God, in the far country of sin, is set in the forefront; and nowhere in the whole range of literature, either sacred or secular, do we have a more vivid picture of the awful truth that *“the way of the transgressor is hard”* than that which is presented to us in this matchless story. The message of the parable is unmistakably clear; namely, the hunger in the heart of God for the return of the prodigal and the longing in the heart of the prodigal for God and home.

The departure From Home

“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” (Lk. 15:11-12). The prodigal son was weary of the home restraints and wanted to be free. He could not indulge the lusts of the flesh while living in his Father’s house. He thought life would be sweeter and happier in an environment away from his home influence. There are people who wish more liberties than their heavenly father will allow, so they go into the far country of Satan. The prodigal’s father gave him his portion and allowed him to go.

He Wasted His Substance

He *“took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living”* (Lk. 15:13). The fact that he lived this way as soon as he reached the far country is evidence that this is the way he wished to live at home. The prodigal son wasted his substance, money, manhood, self-respect, and good name. Sin saps the vitality of life. *“When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death”* (Jas. 1:15). As this boy wasted his material substance; so many today waste their physical, mental, and spiritual power with which they have been

endowed. God endows us with these powers and expects us to use them to His glory. When we use them for Satan, they are worse than wasted; they are prostituted for base purposes.

Want And Suffering

“And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want” (Lk. 15:14). Only in the heavenly Father can the needs of the soul be found. One who dwells in the far country of sin is not showing any concern for the future. They are living for the present, satisfied with the physical and temporal things as their portion, not trying to make preparation for the future.

“”He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into the 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” (Lk. 15:15-18). This was the lowest depth of degradation to which a Jew could think of going. *“No man gave unto him.”* His evil friends were glad to receive **from** him, but they would not give **to** him. Sin takes all from us, but gives nothing useful in return.

From the prodigal, we learn that a man must come to himself before he can come to God (Lk. 15:17). This is the turning point in the story and in his life. From his pig pen perspective he can see the vanity of self-indulgence and riotous living — that man’s life truly does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (Lk. 12:15), or the transient pleasures they afford. Like the apostle, *“those I counted loss for Christ; Yea doubtless, and I count all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Phil. 3:7-8). Now, he despises what he once yearned for, and yearns for what he once despised. That’s the way it is when men come to themselves. Some would say that the prodigal had lost all. Money gone, friends gone, good times gone, humiliated and hungry out here with the pigs, and so far from home! Yet amazingly, because he comes to himself, he comes to the threshold of a greater inheritance — one that is *“incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away”* (I Pet. 1:4). The prodigal could have stayed in the far country all his life, but this would have been no more than a swine’s existence!

But, in addition, the prodigal shows us that coming to self involves coming to an awareness of personal sin — *“I have sinned against heaven and before thee”* (Lk. 15:18,21). To acknowledge sinning **“against heaven”** implies *“Godly sorrow”* that *“worketh repentance to salvation”* (2 Cor. 7:10). All sin is against God and no sin is rectified without such realization and admission. It takes a true humble spirit to say, *“I have been wrong,”* or *“I have sinned.”* Yet no one returns to God without it. Jesus speaks of such when He says, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”* (Matt 5:3). They seek no alibis, no excuses, no scapegoats. Like David, they confess, *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight”* (Ps. 51:4). Such contriteness of spirit is fundamental to righteousness. Many who find themselves enslaved to sin, never resolve to return from it (Heb. 6:4-6). As someone has well said, Lowliness is the beginning of holiness.

As the prodigal comes to himself and sees his sin, he is also made aware of his need. Those like the self-righteous Pharisees see themselves as *“whole”* who *“need not a physician”* (cf. Matt. 7:12). Others, like the prodigal and publican, see themselves as lost sinners, desperately needing mercy and forgiveness. His deep penitence is suggested in his willingness to be satisfied with the place of a servant instead of that of a son. Only as sinners see such need do they resolve to do something about it. *“I will arise and go to my father”* (Lk. 15:18). So with shame and penitence in the heart and confession on his lips he started back to his father. And so must erring sons come home to the Father and salvation.

The Welcome Home

The father's actions show how tender God's love is toward us. *"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"* (Lk. 15:20). The father was watching. Heaven is interested in us. The father had compassion and showed it by meeting the son and kissing him. God's love is shown by the gift of His Son on the cross, and His willingness to forgive the sinner. The robe was one probably kept for special occasions. It was not for servants. The ring on his finger was to denote the exercise of authority which only a son could exercise for his father. The fatted calf is only part of this demonstration of joy at the return of the son, and a way of suggesting to us the fact that God will receive us back into our place as a child in spite of sins we commit while wandering in the far country of sin.

The father said, *"This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found"* (Lk. 15:24). One may be both dead and alive at the same time, dead to one but alive to another. While we are dead to sin we are alive to God, but when we are alive to sin we are dead to God (Rom. 6:10,11). The same boy who was dead is also said to be lost; and when he was found he was alive. Some get the idea that if one is dead in sin he is incapable of doing anything to be saved. The lost can seek, and determine to go back, and can feel penitent enough to confess his wrongs. Since both words, *"dead"* and *"lost,"* are used with reference to this boy's state, we conclude that the dead in sin can do all these things.

State of Separation From God

It is a state of departure from God. A wasteful state, in which all divine endowments are wasted. A state of vile servitude to Satan. A state of perpetual dissatisfaction, of want and suffering. A state in which we can expect no help from others in that state. A state of death to God and all that is pure and good. A state of madness, when one is not himself; he is not thinking as God gave him the ability to think. Even now many sons, have left the Heavenly father and are blindly pursuing the pleasures in the land of do-as—you-please. God will gladly receive a son of His if that son will return. *"Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"* (Isa. 55:7). The Lord is *"longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* 2 Peter 3:9).
