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THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-24

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"And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of good that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. 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. 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! 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. And he arose, and came to his father. But 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. 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 hand, 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."

We have here a parable of two sons: the prodigal son and the elder brother. Most sermons ignore the elder brother altogether or say little about him. But it seems obvious that Christ told this parable to focus attention on the behavior of the elder brother.

I. The occasion of the parable. When the Pharisees saw all the publicans and sinners come to hear Jesus, they complained, saying, *"This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them."* As if to say, "A man is known by the company he keeps, so there can't be much to Jesus." And so Christ told this threefold parable to draw attention to the way the Pharisees were acting.

A. They were acting unreasonable. *"What man of you having lost a sheep does not leave the ones safe in the fold and go out to seek the lost sheep? Or what woman, when she loses a coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search for the coin until she finds it?"* The man who finds a lost sheep and the woman who finds a lost coin call in their friends to rejoice with them. Christ is saying these publicans and sinners are my lost sheep and lost property and I am doing what you would do if you lost a sheep or a coin.

B. They were not acting like God does. When God sees a sinner repent He rejoices. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. These Pharisees were neither acting sensibly nor

heavenly. They were putting sheep and silver before the welfare of human souls.

II. The parable of the prodigal. "The most divinely tender and most humanly touching story ever told." It touches the nerve of actual life. The boy who has churned his life into a fleshly mess, repents and is saved.

A man had two sons. The younger requested and was given his part of the estate, gathers it all together, and leaves home for the far country. He has a wonderful time while he is wasting his substance in riotous living. With everything gone, he begins to feel the pinch of hunger. In desperation he gets a job of feeding swine, the most shameful work a Jew could do. He tried to satisfy his hunger by eating the carob pods the hogs fed on, but hog food could not satisfy his hunger. He talks to himself about conditions back home. In his father's house the hired men had all they could eat, and here he was perishing with hunger. He made up his mind that he would return home and take the consequences. He did not expect to be welcomed or treated very well; he would be satisfied with a place of hired servant. Just anything to be back in the father's house. He makes him up a speech he will say, *"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."* And he arose and came to his father. He must have rehearsed his speech as he trudged the way back home, all the while wondering about the attitude of his father. To his surprise his father saw him while he

was a great way off, was moved with pity, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And when the boy gets a chance to talk, he begins his speech, saying, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*" And this is all he gets to say. He does not get to finish his speech and say, "*Make me as one of thy hired servants.*" The father calls for the servants to bring out the best robe and put on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And go kill the fatted calf, and let us eat and make merry. And the reason for all the joy was that the dead son was alive, and the lost son has been found. And they began to be merry.

Analyze this beautiful story: In the prodigal we have:

A. Assertion of self-will. "Give me my part of the estate now." He wants to get away from the restraints of home. He wants freedom. He wants to live his own life. He wants to do as he pleases. He wants liberty without law. This was the primeval lie: liberty without law. This was Satan's lie and Adam's sin: assert your own will and ignore the restraint of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect man since Adam before his fall, said, "*I come to do thy will, O God.*" The father makes no attempt to hold the boy at home. Home would not be home to a boy who wants his own way. And so the father divided unto each son his rightful share.

B. Apostasy of conduct. This assertion of self-will soon led to bad conduct. "*Not many days after, he gathered all together and went his own way.*" He called in all the loans, sold all the land, turned all jewels into money. With pockets bulging with cash, the boy goes into a far country. He gets as far away from home with its restraints as he can. Now he could live in unfettered joy. Now he could live it up. And so the primeval lie of liberty without law became the deed. Why not express ourselves? With all this red blood dancing in our veins, why not give in to our desires? Liberty without law is a dangerous delusion, whether in the natural or moral realm. A man can demonstrate his freedom by jumping from a tenth-floor window. But the law of gravitation is not destroyed; it is the

man who is dead. And so moral freedom is always within limits; there is a moral law which says that the wages of sin is death. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

C. Spendthrift folly. He wasted his substance. For a while there are glorious days and sparkling nights. He is really living it up. Day by day he scatters what he had gathered. Living to gratify the flesh is a scattering business. Sin is a losing business, whether it be the sin of the believer or the unbeliever.

D. Waste led to poverty and destitution. "*There arose a mighty famine.*" The prodigal began to be in want. But he will not return home. He will stick to his bargain, poor as it is. He will lie on the bed he himself has made. And so he joined himself to a citizen of the far country. He hires himself to a Gentile master who sends him to feed hogs. "Sent him"--where is his boast of freedom now? To feed hogs, a shameful task for a Jew. But he will stick to his bargain and stay away from the father's house. But he is still not ready to give up. He tried to feed on the husks the hogs fed on. "*And no man gave unto him.*" His companions in sin forsook him. Having sucked him dry, they threw him away. Friends in sin are never friends in need.

E. And so he finally came to himself. Self-will is not our true self; it is our fallen self; the expression of fallen human nature. "*God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many evil inventions.*" The prodigal is typical of all humanity in his sins and he typifies the repentance of all who are saved. The sinner is insane. Sin is insanity. To be saved, the sinner must come to himself. He must realize the predicament he is in. When he came to himself he said, "*I will arise and go to my father and tell him I have sinned and am without any claims upon him as a son.*"

F. He resolved to cast himself on his father's mercy. What else can a sinner do but to come to God for mercy? Who can hope for salvation on grounds of justice. Who wants God to give him what he has earned? The sinner is crazy so long as he hopes to be saved by his own merit. The prodigal talked about his sin, not about his good-

ness. He had nothing but sins to bring to his father. All he had was an empty stomach, rags on his back, and bleeding feet. All he had was his lost condition; and all he could hope in was the mercy of the father.

III. This parable illustrates the doctrine of repentance. It traces the career of every sinner who realizes he is lost and returns to God. It was meant to teach one thing; salvation is for sinners, and that to be saved one must take the place of a sinner and claim nothing of merit. To find mercy with God the sinner must come to God through Jesus Christ. Christ is God's mercy-seat. Christ said, "*No man cometh to the Father but by me.*" There is no mercy with God apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

"AND I, IF I BE LIFTED UP..."

BY: C. D. COLE

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,"
John 12:32.

The wondering temple officers sent to apprehend Jesus, returned to their masters and said, *"Never man spake like this man."* The great claims He made and the boldness of His assertions at once mark Him as more than man or else a very bad man. He was either the Son of God or an arrogant boaster. Just think of such sayings as these: *"I am the light of the world," "I am the bread of life," "I am the door, by me, if any man enter in he shall be saved," "I am the resurrection and the life," "A greater than Solomon is here," "Before Abraham was I am."*

We do not usually take boasters seriously and their great claims are usually met with a sneer and scorn. But the claims of Jesus Christ go unchallenged, even by those who have not trusted Him as their Saviour. Napoleon and others have given Him unstinted praise, acknowledging Him as unique in every respect, and yet did not trust Him as Saviour. In this they reveal their lack of straight thinking, for if Jesus of Nazareth is what He claimed to be, He surely is a safe object of trust. I accept Him as my Saviour because I accept the claims He made for Himself. Believing Him to be the light of the world, I turn from all other ideas and ways of salvation to Him as only Saviour. Believing Him to be the bread of life, I let my soul feed on Him as the only hope of living forever before God without dread of divine justice. Believing Him to be the resurrection and the life, I shall go into the grave in hope of immortality for this body.

Jesus Christ never made a more startling utterance than when He spoke the words of our text: *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."* John says that He made this statement to indicate what kind of death He would die. And the kind of death He died is a very important matter. It is not enough that He died. His death is a historical fact de-

nied by few. And this message has to do primarily with the kind of death He died.

Three times in His short career, He spoke of His death as a being lifted up. Early in His career He said, *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."* About the middle of His career, He said to His caviling opponents: *"When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then ye shall know that I am he."* And here, towards the end, He uttered the words of our text: *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."*

I. Jesus Christ selected the manner of His death. He chose the way He would die, and even the hour He was to die. The time and manner of His death were not left to chance or to the whims of men. He controlled empires and directed kings, and made the wrath of man to praise Him in bringing about His death as He had eternally planned. This is why the Roman method of capital punishment was by crucifixion rather than by stoning or some other method. This is why Jesus Christ did not live and die here in America in this 20th century. Had He waited until now to come and had been born and reared in America, He would have been put to death by electrocution or hanging instead of by crucifixion.

II. Jesus Christ chose this way to die because it indicated the curse of God. *"And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree; His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance,"* Deuteronomy 21:22, 23. For His death to mean anything to sinners, it must represent

the curse of God. Sinners are under the curse of God's holy law and whoever saves them must bear the curse. If Jesus had died as an example or if the moral influence theory of the atonement were true, the manner of His death would not have been important. God's Word had declared centuries before that when you see a man hanging on a tree, you can know that man is accursed of God. Jesus Christ redeemed us from the curse by being made a curse.

III. This means that Jesus Christ died as a substitute for sinners. He died instead of sinners. Somebody has to die for sin, for the wages of sin is death. And the only way any sinner can miss condemnation and punishment is to have another bear it for him. If Jesus was punished for me, I will not have to be punished for my sins.

"If Christ has my discharge procured and safely in my place endured the whole of wrath divine; payment God cannot twice demand; first at my bleeding Surety's hand and then again at mine."

IV. If Christ died for sinners of all periods of time--if His death had the same value to Abel and Noah and Abraham and David as it does to me--then it could only be substitutionary in its nature. In Hebrews 9:15 we are told that Christ died for the redemption of transgressions that were under the first covenant. This means that He died for those who lived before He came. His death was retroactive. It had the same value to Old Testament saints as it has to us. His death could not be an example to the dead--it could have no moral influence on people who had lived and died hundreds of years before He came.

V. The death of Jesus Christ justifies both God and men. *"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of*

God: To declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," Romans 3:25, 26. This portion of scripture says that the death of Christ was a present revelation of God's justice in passing over the sins of Old Testament believers. God's justice could not be seen in the salvation of Abel and Abraham and David. They were saved before their sins had been atoned for. And the death of Christ was demonstration of His justice. If Christ had not died under the curse of the law they had broken, God would have been unjust in saving them. The death of Christ takes care of the honor of God as well as the safety of men.

VI. The results of His death.

Our text says that all men will be drawn to Him. At first sight this seems to teach universalism --the salvation of every individual. But this cannot be true for several reasons:

A. It is contrary to known facts. It is a well-known fact that many individuals have not been drawn to Christ. Nobody could be drawn to Him who have never heard about Him, and millions upon millions have died without ever hearing the name of Jesus.

B. There is no word for man in the original text. It simply says that He will draw all unto Himself. *"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,"* John 6:37; *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,"* John 10:27; *"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd,"* John 10:16; *"As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him,"* John 17:2.

C. How does Christ draw men to Himself? It is not a physical drawing. There is no physical approach to Jesus. He does the drawing by working on the minds and hearts of men. It is by the miracle of the new birth. It is by giving men a change of mind towards God, and by working faith in them in Him as their only hope. And this involves our

witnessing and preaching and praying.

Conclusion: In this text, we have the way of salvation made plain. Men are saved by being drawn to Christ. When they are drawn to Christ they come to Christ. Have you come to Christ for salvation? Men are not saved by living a good life; they are saved by coming to Christ. They are not saved by coming into the church; they are saved by coming to Christ. To be saved by what we do would be self-salvation. To be saved by faith in Christ is salvation by grace.