

This is a portion of a larger book. In this version, the Bible texts have been modified into modern English, the punctuation improved, headings and emphasis may have been added, and some sentences realigned.

Christ's Object Lessons (The parables)

[I have added the emphases]

Chapter 16

“Lost, and is Found”

This chapter is based on Luke 15:11-32.

The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, bring out in distinct lines God's pitying love for those who are straying from Him. Although they have turned away from God, He does not leave them in their misery. He is full of kindness and tender pity toward all who are exposed to the temptations of the artful foe. {COL 198.1}

In the parable of the prodigal son is presented the Lord's dealing with those who have once known the Father's love, but who have allowed the tempter to lead them captive at his will. {COL 198.2}

“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. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.” {COL 198.3}

This younger son had become weary of the restraint of his father's house. He thought that his liberty was restricted. His father's love and care for him were misinterpreted, and he determined to follow the dictates of his own inclination. {COL 198.4}

The youth acknowledges no obligation to his father, and expresses no gratitude; yet he claims the privilege of a child in sharing his father's goods. The inheritance that would fall to him at his father's death he desires to receive now. He is bent on present enjoyment, and cares not for the future. {COL 199.1}

Having obtained his patrimony, he goes into “a far country,” away from his father’s home. With money in plenty, and liberty to do as he likes, he flatters himself that the desire of his heart is reached. There is no one to say, Do not do this, for it will be an injury to yourself; or, Do this, because it is right. Evil companions help him to plunge ever deeper into sin, and he wastes his “substance with riotous living.” {COL 199.2}

The Bible tells of men who “professing themselves to be wise” “became fools” (Romans 1:22); and this is the history of the young man of the parable. The wealth which he has selfishly claimed from his father he squanders upon harlots. The treasure of his young manhood is wasted.

The precious years of life, the strength of intellect, the bright visions of youth, the spiritual aspirations — all are consumed in the fires of lust. {COL 199.3}

A great famine arises, he begins to be in want, and he joins himself to a citizen of the country, who sends him into the field to feed swine. To a Jew this was the most menial and degrading of employments. The youth who has boasted of his liberty, now finds himself a slave. He is in the worst of bondage — “holden with the cords of his sins.” (Proverbs 5:22.) The glitter and tinsel that enticed him have disappeared, and he feels the burden of his chain. Sitting upon the ground in that desolate and famine-stricken land, with no companions but the swine, he is fain to fill himself with the husks on which the beasts are fed. Of the gay companions who flocked about him in his prosperous days and ate and drank at his expense, there is not one left to befriend him. Where now is his riotous joy? Stilling his conscience, benumbing his sensibilities, he thought himself happy; but now, with money spent, with hunger unsatisfied, with pride humbled, with his moral nature dwarfed, with his will weak and untrustworthy, with his finer feelings seemingly dead, he is the most wretched of mortals. {COL 200.1}

What a picture here of the sinner’s state! Although surrounded with the blessings of His love, there is nothing that the sinner, bent on self-indulgence and sinful pleasure, desires so much as separation from God. Like the ungrateful son, he claims the good things of God as his by right. He takes them as a matter of course, and makes no return of gratitude, renders no service of love. As Cain went out from the presence of the Lord to seek his home; as the prodigal wandered into the “far country,” so do sinners seek happiness in forgetfulness of God. (Romans 1:28). {COL 200.2}

Whatever the appearance may be, every life centered in self is squandered. Whoever attempts to live apart from God is wasting his substance. He is

squandering the precious years, squandering the powers of mind and heart and soul, and working to make himself bankrupt for eternity. The man who separates from God that he may serve himself, is the slave of mammon. The mind that God created for the companionship of angels has become degraded to the service of that which is earthly and bestial. This is the end to which self-serving tends. {COL 200.3}

If you have chosen such a life, you know that you are spending money for that which is not bread, and labor for that which satisfieth not. There come to you hours when you realize your degradation. Alone in the far country you feel your misery, and in despair you cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Romans 7:24.

It is the statement of a universal truth which is contained in the prophet's words, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited." Jeremiah 17:5, 6. God "makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45); but men have the power to shut themselves away from sunshine and shower. So while the Sun of Righteousness shines, and the showers of grace fall freely for all, we may by separating ourselves from God still "inhabit the parched places in the wilderness." {COL 201.1}

The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father's house. The prodigal son in his wretchedness "came to himself." The deceptive power that Satan had exercised over him was broken. He saw that his suffering was the result of his own folly, and 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." Miserable as he was, the prodigal found hope in the conviction of his father's love. It was that love which was drawing him toward home. So it is the assurance of God's love that constrains the sinner to return to God. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." Romans 2:4. A golden chain, the mercy and compassion of divine love, is passed around every imperiled soul. The Lord declares, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Jeremiah 31:3. {COL 202.1}

The son determines to confess his guilt. He will go to his father, saying, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be

called thy son.” But he adds, showing how stunted is his conception of his father’s love, “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” {COL 202.2}

The young man turns from the swine herds and the husks, and sets his face toward home. Trembling with weakness and faint from hunger, he presses eagerly on his way. He has no covering to conceal his rags; but his misery has conquered pride, and he hurries on to beg a servant’s place where he was once a child. {COL 202.3}

Little did the gay, thoughtless youth, as he went out from his father’s gate, dream of the ache and longing left in that father’s heart. When he danced and feasted with his wild companions, little did he think of the shadow that had fallen on his home. And now as with weary and painful steps he pursues the homeward way, he knows not that one is watching for his return. But while he is yet “a great way off” the father discerns his form. Love is of quick sight. Not even the degradation of the years of sin can conceal the son from the father’s eyes. He “had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck” in a long, clinging, tender embrace. {COL 203.1}

The father will permit no contemptuous eye to mock at his son’s misery and tatters. He takes from his own shoulders the broad, rich mantle, and wraps it around the son’s wasted form, and the youth sobs out his repentance, saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” The father holds him close to his side, and brings him home. No opportunity is given him to ask a servant’s place. He is a son, who shall be honored with the best the house affords, and whom the waiting men and women shall respect and serve. {COL 203.2}

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.” {COL 204.1}

In his restless youth the prodigal looked upon his father as stern and severe. How different his conception of him now! So those who are deceived by Satan look upon God as hard and exacting. They regard Him as watching to denounce and condemn, as unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there is a legal excuse for not helping him. His law they regard as a restriction upon men’s happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they are glad to escape. But he whose eyes have been opened by the love of Christ will behold God as full of compassion. He does not appear as a tyrannical, relentless being, but as a father longing to embrace his repenting son. The sinner will exclaim

with the Psalmist, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.” Psalm 103:13. {COL 204.2}

In the parable there is no taunting, no casting up to the prodigal of his evil course. The son feels that the past is forgiven and forgotten, blotted out forever. And so God says to the sinner, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins,” Isaiah 44:22. “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:34. “Let the wicked forsake his way, 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.” Isaiah 55:7. “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.” Jeremiah 50:20. {COL 204.3}

What assurance here, of God’s willingness to receive the repenting sinner! Have you, reader, chosen your own way? Have you wandered far from God? Have you sought to feast upon the fruits of transgression, only to find them turn to ashes upon your lips? And now, your substance spent, your life-plans thwarted, and your hopes dead, do you sit alone and desolate? Now that voice which has long been speaking to your heart but to which you would not listen comes to you distinct and clear, “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest; because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction.” Micah 2:10. Return to your Father’s house. He invites you, saying, “Return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee.” Isaiah 44:22. {COL 205.1}

Do not listen to the enemy’s suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better; until you are good enough to come to God. If you wait until then, you will never come. When Satan points to your filthy garments, repeat the promise of Jesus, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” John 6:37. Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Make the prayer of David your own, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Psalm 51:7. {COL 205.2}

Arise and go to your Father. He will meet you a great way off. If you take even one step toward Him in repentance, He will hasten to enfold you in His arms of infinite love. His ear is open to the cry of the contrite soul. The very first reaching out of the heart after God is known to Him. Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the

heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul. {COL 206.1}

Your heavenly Father will take from you the garments defiled by sin. In the beautiful parabolic prophecy of Zechariah, the high priest Joshua, standing clothed in filthy garments before the angel of the Lord, represents the sinner. And the word is spoken by the Lord, “Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.... So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments.” Zechariah 3:4, 5. Even so God will clothe you with “the garments of salvation,” and cover you with “the robe of righteousness.” Isaiah 61:10. “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” Psalm 68:13. {COL 206.2}

He will bring you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you shall be love. (Song of Solomon 2:4) “If thou wilt walk in My ways,” He declares, “I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by” — even among the holy angels that surround His throne. (Zechariah 3:7). {COL 206.3}

“As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” Isaiah 62:5. “He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing.” Zephaniah 3:17. And heaven and earth shall unite in the Father’s song of rejoicing: “For this My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” {COL 207.1}

Thus far in the Saviour’s parable there is no discordant note to jar the harmony of the scene of joy; but now Christ introduces another element. When the prodigal came home, the 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.” This elder brother has not been sharing in his father’s anxiety and watching for the one that was lost. He shares not, therefore, in the father’s joy at the wanderer’s return. The sounds of rejoicing kindle no gladness in his heart. He inquires of a servant the reason of the festivity, and the answer excites his jealousy. He will not go in to welcome his lost brother. The favor shown the prodigal he regards as an insult to himself. {COL 207.2}

When the father comes out to remonstrate with him, the pride and malignity of his nature are revealed. He dwells upon his own life in his father’s house

as a round of unrequited service, and then places in mean contrast the favor shown to the son just returned. ***He makes it plain that his own service has been that of a servant rather than a son. When he should have found an abiding joy in his father's presence, his mind has rested upon the profit to accrue from his circumspect life.*** His words show that it is for this he has foregone the pleasures of sin. Now if this brother is to share in the father's gifts, the elder son counts that he himself has been wronged. He grudges his brother the favor shown him. He plainly shows that had he been in the father's place, he would not have received the prodigal. He does not even acknowledge him as a brother, but coldly speaks of him as "thy son." {COL 207.3}

Yet the father deals tenderly with him. "Son," he says, "thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Through all these years of your brother's outcast life, have you not had the privilege of companionship with me? {COL 208.1}

Everything that could minister to the happiness of his children was freely theirs. The son need have no question of gift or reward. "All that I have is thine." You have only to believe my love, and take the gift that is freely bestowed. {COL 208.2}

One son had for a time cut himself off from the household, not discerning the father's love. But now he has returned, and the tide of joy sweeps away every disturbing thought. "This thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." {COL 209.1}

Was the elder brother brought to see his own mean, ungrateful spirit? Did he come to see that though his brother had done wickedly, he was his brother still? Did the elder brother repent of his jealousy and hardheartedness? Concerning this, Christ was silent. For the parable was still enacting, and it rested with His hearers to determine what the outcome should be. {COL 209.2}

By the elder son were represented the unrepenting Jews of Christ's day, and also the Pharisees in every age, who look with contempt upon those whom they regard as publicans and sinners. Because they themselves have not gone to great excesses in vice, they are filled with self-righteousness. Christ met these cavilers on their own ground. Like the elder son in the parable, they had enjoyed special privileges from God. They claimed to be sons in God's house, but they had the spirit of the hireling. They were working, not from love, but from hope of reward. In their eyes, God was an exacting taskmaster. They saw Christ inviting publicans and sinners to receive freely

the gift of His grace — the gift which the rabbis hoped to secure only by toil and penance — and they were offended. The prodigal’s return, which filled the Father’s heart with joy, only stirred them to jealousy. {COL 209.3}

In the parable the father’s remonstrance with the elder son was Heaven’s tender appeal to the Pharisees. “All that I have is thine” — not as wages, but as a gift. Like the prodigal, you can receive it only as the unmerited bestowal of the Father’s love. {COL 209.4}

Self-righteousness not only leads men to misrepresent God, but makes them coldhearted and critical toward their brethren. The elder son, in his selfishness and jealousy, stood ready to watch his brother, to criticize every action, and to accuse him for the least deficiency. He would detect every mistake, and make the most of every wrong act. Thus he would seek to justify his own unforgiving spirit. Many today are doing the same thing. While the soul is making its very first struggles against a flood of temptations, they stand by, stubborn, self-willed, complaining, accusing. They may claim to be children of God, but they are acting out the spirit of Satan. By their attitude toward their brethren, these accusers place themselves where God cannot give them the light of His countenance. {COL 210.1}

Many are constantly questioning, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?” But “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Micah 6:6-8. {COL 210.2}

This is the service that God has chosen — “to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke, ... and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.” Isaiah 58:6, 7. When you see yourselves as sinners saved only by the love of your heavenly Father, you will have tender pity for others who are suffering in sin. You will no longer meet misery and repentance with jealousy and censure. When the ice of selfishness is melted from your hearts, you will be in sympathy with God, and will share His joy in the saving of the lost. {COL 210.3}

It is true that you claim to be a child of God; but if this claim be true, it is “thy brother” that was “dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” He is bound to you by the closest ties; for God recognizes him as a son.

Deny your relationship to him, and you show that you are but a hireling in the household, not a child in the family of God. {COL 211.1}

Though you will not join in the greeting to the lost, the joy will go on, the restored one will have his place by the Father's side and in the Father's work. He that is forgiven much, the same loves much. But you will be in the darkness without. For "he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." 1 John 4:8. {COL 211.2}

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