

GREAT FORGIVENESS FOR GREAT SIN NO. 2863

A WATCH-NIGHT SERMON
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*“In whom we have redemption through the blood, the forgiveness
of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”
Ephesians 1:7.*

You scarcely need me to say that Paul is here writing concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, Christ was his constant theme, both in preaching and writing. I have heard of ministers who can preach a sermon without mentioning the name of Jesus from beginning to end. If you ever hear such a sermon as that, mind that you never hear another from that man! If a baker once made me a loaf of bread without any flour in it, I would take good care that he should never do so again. And I say the same of the man who can preach a Christless gospel! Let those go to hear him who do not value their immortal souls, but, dear friends, your soul and mine are too precious to be placed at the mercy of such a preacher! Paul's harp had only one string, but he brought such music out of it as never came from any other! He found such infinite variety in Christ, that he never exhausted his theme. With him it was Christ first, Christ last, Christ midst, Christ everywhere—and so he could never have his pen in his hand without writing something in praise of his glorious Lord and Savior!

Paul had good reasons for doing this, for Christ had met him on his way to Damascus, stopped him in his persecuting career, renewed his heart, and given him a bias ever afterwards towards his new Master! Never did Paul forget that spot, on the road to Damascus! I will guarantee you that he could have found it to his dying day—that spot where he fell to the ground, and heard the voice from heaven saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” He was a different man ever afterwards! That one event had turned the whole current of his life, so that, from then on, for him to live was Christ. Previously, he had breathed out threats and slaughter against all who bore the name of Christ. Now, he breathes out Christ and His gospel, and has nothing else for which he cares to live, and is even willing to die for Him! “But,” says someone, “do you not think that Paul carried this idea a little too far? A man of one idea rides his hobby to death, and he does not see the other things that are around him.” Ah, sir! Paul did see all around him that which was worth seeing! For him, everything above, below, within, without, around, had Christ in it, just as, on a bright summer's day, everything has sunshine in it. And, like the apostle, we can never exaggerate when we rightly speak of Jesus, “for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” and in Him is stored up all manner of riches and treasures for poor sinful creatures like ourselves!

I am going to magnify Christ, as His gracious Spirit shall help me, by speaking of the pardon of sin which freely comes to us through the redemption which He obtained for us by the shedding of His precious blood. I shall have two divisions. First, *the sins, spoken of in our text, are great sins*. And, secondly, *the forgiveness, spoken of in our text, is also great*—“according to the riches of His grace.”

I. First, then, **THE SINS MENTIONED HERE ARE GREAT**. Because we preach the greatness of God's mercy, some wicked minds think that sin is but a little thing. But, sirs it is not so. And if any of you are living in it, listen to me while I try to show you how great it is.

For, first, *see what sin has done to us all*. Our first parents lived in a garden of delights, and, if they had not sinned, we would have been heirs to a happy life free from sickness, sorrow, and death. But sin entered the Garden of Eden, and withered every leaf, blighted every flower, and, soon, Adam was driven out to till the ground that brought forth thorns and thistles in abundance. As for the woman, she and her daughters were condemned to bring forth children in pain and sorrow. Now look at the result of sin all

over the world—the poverty that springs from drunkenness, the disease that comes of debauchery, the pangs of conscience that follow all evil-doing. And when you have gazed at the misery now existing on this earth, think of the many graveyards and cemeteries with their myriads of tombs. The very dust which flies down our streets, was, much of it, once alive as part of the body of one of our forefathers! This earth is, indeed, a huge morgue! What was it that slew all these people, and dug all these graves? It was sin, for, “sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” It is no small thing that has worked all this mischief among mankind!

If any of you doubt the greatness of sin, let me remind you of *what has happened to those who have died in it*. This Bible, which is the revelation of God, tells us that sinners who die impenitent are driven from the presence of God into the outer darkness where there will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth forever! I cannot adequately depict that dread abode of lost souls, but there are already myriads there, without light, or hope, or joy, or comfort, waiting for the Day of Judgment when their bodies shall rise, and body and soul shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And then will come upon them “the terror of the Lord.” If I had to describe the woes of the lost, the language I would have to use would be exceedingly strong, but where would I have to look for it? I would not go to Milton, and the other poets, but I would have to gather similes most terrible from the lips of the gentle and loving Christ, for it is He who has told us most about these things! Because He loved men so dearly, He faithfully warned them of the wrath to come—and one proof that sin is no trifle is that the wrath to come is so terrible!

If any still doubt whether sin is a great thing, I ask them to remember *that it must be great because it takes such great grace to pardon it*. Our text teaches us that the forgiveness of sin is according to the riches of God’s grace—as if, in order to get rid of sin, the infinite wealth of His great heart of love must be freely spent. God, who delights in mercy, had to lay out a mint of grace before sin could be pardoned! Therefore, sin is no small thing.

But if you would really know how great a thing sin is, *remember what it cost Christ to be its Forgiver*. Go to Gethsemane and see what it cost Christ to bear it there. The sin that covered Him with a bloody sweat was no trifle. Then follow Him to Pilate’s hall and hear the cruel whips falling on His blessed shoulders, for it is with those stripes that you are healed, and it must be a dire disease that needs such sharp medicine! See the soldiers take Him away, and nail Him to the cross. There He hangs, between heaven and earth, to die for guilty sinners amid untold anguish which no human eye could see, and no mortal mind could understand. Yet there could never have been any forgiveness for sin if there had not been all these pangs on the part of the sinner’s Substitute. Surely, sin must be a great thing to need such a great sacrifice to put it away.

While I am recalling these familiar truths, I hope somebody is saying, “Ah, sir, I know that my sins are great!” You need not go into particulars, for, if nobody else’s sin is great, mine is.” Let us all look over the records of this year, and see whether it is not so with us. Get out your diary. Ah, you do not put down such things there—you try to forget them! I have been told that, in Naples, there used to be a pit for every day in the year, and each day they took the dead out of the city, and flung them into the pit for that day. So there were 365 of these pits which were opened, year after year. In a similar style, you have buried your sins in these 365 days. Let us roll one of the big stones away, and look down. No, no! We could not bear to do so, for even one day’s sin has such filthiness about it that we cry, if we are in our right senses, “Bury my dead out of my sight!” Think what your sins have been. Think of the idle words you have spoken—for every one of which you will have to give account. Think of the evil thoughts you have had—angry thoughts, proud thoughts, lustful thoughts—they are all sins! Oh, what a terrible heap they make! Would any man here like to shoot out his sins on this platform? I can never understand how a so-called “priest” can ask people to confess their sins to him. I would not make my ear into a common sewer for all the wealth in the world! What foulness there must be on the soul of him who has heard what others have done, and who knows what sin he has himself committed! Sin, when we see what it really is, whether in ourselves or in others, horrifies us!

But there is one thing I want you to remember. If there has been nothing done, or said, or thought by you of which you can convict yourself, yet, if you are not now loving God—if for another year you have been God’s enemy; if for another year you have refused Christ, and have lived without prayer, without repentance, and without seeking to be right with God. If for another year you have been indifferent to the claims of the Most High, and careless of His commands—if you have done nothing else but forget God—*that one sin* would be enough to cast you into hell forever! Remember David’s words, “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

II. Now I turn to the much more joyful side of my subject which is that THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN IS ALSO A GREAT THING.

Is there such a thing as forgiveness of sin? When Martin Luther was in great trouble because of his sin, he obtained much consolation from the remark of a brother monk, who, observing him so cast down, asked him, "Martin, can you say the Credo?" Martin, of course, answered, "Yes." "Then, do you not remember," said the monk, "that in the Credo it is written, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins'?" Light seemed to break in upon Luther's darkness by that simple question, as I pray that it may break upon yours while I speak upon that blessed article of a true Christian's creed.

First, you may judge the greatness of the forgiveness *by the greatness of the sin which God forgives in a single moment*. I do not know your age, my dear friend. Say, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, 80 years—possibly, even 90—but, if you now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, this very instant the whole mass of your sin will disappear forever! I have heard of one who had lent much money to a debtor, and who had received from him many bonds. And when he found the debtor sinking into hopeless bankruptcy, he sent for him, and, after showing him the bonds, the amount of which he was unable to meet, even to the extent of a penny in the pound, the generous creditor said, "There is only one way in which we can settle all this debt." And, gathering up all the bonds in his hand, he cast them into the fire. "Now," he said, "I wish you a happy new year. Go your way, for you are out of debt to me." That was a noble thing for anyone to do, and I feel sure that the bond for a thousand pounds would burn as fast as a bond for 50 pounds. So the Lord takes all the bonds of our sin throughout our whole lifetime, and puts them into the blaze of His infinite mercy—and they all disappear so that, if our sins are searched for, they cannot be found!

Next, measure the greatness of the forgiveness *by the guilt of the sin forgiven*. I always feel that I must speak guardedly upon this point, but I will be as bold as I may. Sinner, if you trust in Christ, He will forgive you the blackest sin into which you have ever fallen. If (God grant that it may not be true!) the crime of murder should be on your conscience; if adultery and fornication should have blackened your very soul; if all the sins that men have ever committed, enormous and stupendous in their aggravation, should be rightly charged to your account, yet, remember that "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all our sin." And remember, also, "He that believes in Him is justified from all things," however black they may be! I like the way Luther talks upon this subject, though he is sometimes rather too bold. He says, "Jesus Christ is not a sham Savior for sham sinners, but He is a real Savior who offers a real atonement for real sin, for gross crimes, for shameless offenses, for transgressions of every sort and every size." And a far greater One than Luther has said, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." I have set the door of mercy open wide, have I not? There is no one here who will dare to say, "Mr. Spurgeon said that I was too guilty to be forgiven." I have said nothing of the kind! However great your guilt, though your sins, like the great mountains tower above the clouds, the floods of divine mercy can roll over the tops of the highest mountains of iniquity, and drown them all! God give you grace to believe this, and to prove it true this very hour!

In the third place, the greatness of God's forgiveness may be judged *by the freeness of it*. When a poor sinner comes to Christ for pardon, Christ does not ask him to pay anything for it, or to *do* anything, or to *be* anything, or to *feel* anything, but He freely forgives him! I know what you think. "I shall have to go through a certain penance of heart, at any rate, if not of body. I shall have to weep so much, or pray so much, or do so much, or feel so much." That is not what the gospel says—that is only your fancy. The gospel is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Trust Jesus Christ, and the free pardon of sin is at once given "without money, and without price"!

Another thing that indicates its greatness is *its immediateness*. God will forgive you at once, as soon as you trust Christ. There was a daughter, well beloved by her father, who, in an evil hour, left her home and came to London. Here, having no friends, she soon fell prey to wicked men, and became an utter wreck. A city missionary met with her, and spoke faithfully to her about her sin—and the Holy Spirit brought her to the Savior's feet. The missionary asked for her father's name and address, and at last she told him. But she said, "It is no use for you to write him. I have brought such dishonor on my family that I am quite certain he would not reply to any letter." They wrote to the father and stated the case—and the letter that came back bore on the envelope, in large text hand, the word, "IMMEDIATE." Inside, he wrote, "I have prayed every day that I might find my child, and am rejoiced to hear of her. Let her come home at once. I have freely forgiven her, and I long to clasp her to my bosom." Now, soul, if you seek

mercy, this is just what the Lord will do with you. He will send you mercy marked, "IMMEDIATE," and you shall have it at once! I recollect how I found mercy, in a moment, as I was told to look to Jesus, and I would be forgiven. I did look, and, swift as a lightning flash, I received the pardon of sin in which I have rejoiced to this very hour! Why should it not be the same with you—the blackest and worst sinner here—the most unfeeling and the least likely to repent? Lord, grant it, and You shall have the praise!

Again, the greatness of God's forgiveness may be measured *by the completeness of it*. When a man trusts Christ, and is forgiven, his sin is so entirely gone that it is as though it had never been! Your children bring home their copy-books without any blots in them, but if you look carefully, you can see where blots have been erased. But when the Lord Jesus Christ blots out the sins of His people, He leaves no marks of erasure, and the forgiven sinners are as much accepted before God as if they had never sinned!

Perhaps someone says, "You are putting the matter very strongly." I know I am, but not more strongly than the Word of God does. The prophet Micah, speaking to the Lord under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says, "You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Not into the shallows, where they might be dredged up again, but into the great deeps, as in the middle of the Atlantic! Then Isaiah says to the Lord, "You have cast all my sins behind Your back." Can you tell me where God's back is? God's face is everywhere—then where is His back, and where are His people's sins? Why, nowhere at all! Daniel says that the work of the Messiah is to finish the transgression—and it is finished for all who believe in Him. Daniel also says that He is to make an end of sins—then there is an end of them for all who trust in Him! Then there is that glorious passage which cannot be quoted too often—"In those days, and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none." What? All my sins gone? Yes, they are all gone if you believe in Jesus, for He cast them into His tomb where they are buried forever! This is enough to make you dance, like David did before the ark, for, when God once pardons a man, He never condemns him again! It is not God's way to play fast and loose with people. If I am in Christ Jesus, the verdict of, "No condemnation," must always be mine, for who can condemn the one for whom Christ has died? No one, for, "whom He justified, them He also glorified." If you have trusted your soul upon the atonement made by the blood of Christ, you are absolved, and you may go your way in peace, knowing that neither death nor hell shall ever divide you from Christ! You are His, and you shall be His forever and ever!

"Well," asks one, "that is a great thing. How is it to be obtained?" It is to be had for nothing, simply for the asking, simply by trusting Christ. If that is done, all is done, and all these blessings are yours, and yours forevermore!

Now I close by showing you how really God forgives sin. I am sure He does, for I have proved it in my own case, and I have heard of many more like myself. I have known the Lord to take a man full of sin, and renew him, and, in a moment to make him feel, and feel it truly, too, "God loves me." And he has cried, "Abba, Father," and he has begun to pray, and has had answers to prayer! And God has manifested His infinite grace to him in a thousand ways. By-and-by, that man has been trusted by God with some service for Him, as Paul and others were put in trust with the gospel—and as some of us also are. With some of us, the Lord has been very familiar, and very kind, and has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.

Now I have done when I have just said that, as these things are true, then nobody ought to despair. Come, sister, smooth those wrinkles out of your forehead! You have been saying, "I shall never be saved," but you must not talk like that, for Christ's forgiveness of sin is "according to the riches of His grace." And, brother, are you in trouble because you have sinned against God? As He is so ready to forgive, you ought to be sorry that you have grieved such a gracious God! As He is so ready to forgive, let us be ready to be forgiven! Let us not leave this house, though the midnight hour is about to strike, until we have received this great redemption, this great forgiveness for great sin!

Perhaps someone says, "When I get home, I will ask God's forgiveness." Do not wait until you get home! Suppose that I had done some wrong to any of you, and that I sat next to you—I do not think that I should wait until we entered the new year before asking you to forgive me. Do so with God—say to Him, "Since You are so ready to forgive, I ask to be forgiven. I trust that I shall be forgiven through Jesus Christ, Your Son." It is a grand thing to begin the new year with a new heart, and a new spirit! That would set all the bells of your soul ringing. The question is, Will you believe on the Son of God? In the name of Jesus Christ who died upon the cross, I demand your faith in Him! He is no impostor. He is no

pretender. He is worthy of your heart's trust, so believe in Him. I pray the Holy Spirit to work this faith in you, that you may be saved, and saved now, and receive at once the forgiveness of all your sins!

Thus have I preached the gospel to you. If you reject it, it is at your peril. I draw a ring round you as the Roman ambassador drew one round the Eastern monarch and said to him, "Step out of that ring, and it will mean war with Rome." So I draw a ring round the seat where you are sitting, and say to you, in the name of God, "You must not rise up from that seat until you have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, or else have taken upon yourself the responsibility of remaining an enemy of God, for I can say no more to you till the judgment-day breaks, and I have to give account for preaching this sermon—and you have to give account for hearing it! I can say no more than this! There is pardon to be obtained by believing! Jesus Christ is fully worthy of your confidence—trust Him now, and you shall receive full and free forgiveness! The Lord help you to do so, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—548, 562, 595.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

LUKE 15.

[Remember, the exposition was always *before* the sermon.]

We have read this chapter together many times. Possibly some of us have read it hundreds of times, yet whenever we read it, we always find something fresh in it. It is always bright and sparkling, full of diamonds, and other precious gems of truth.

Verses 1-3. *Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners, to hear Him, and the Pharisees, and scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them. And He spoke this parable unto them.*

The deepest feelings of our Savior's heart seem to have been brought out by the two classes of persons here mentioned—His pity and compassion towards the sinful—and His righteous anger at the perpetual objections of the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes. The one class caused His heart to overflow with love, the other excited His burning indignation, yet, even then, His soul was moved with pity and tenderness toward the wandering and erring. We ought to be grateful to the Pharisees for having led our Lord to utter the three wonderful parables which we are about to read. Luke says, "He spoke this parable unto them," implying that the three are really one, a picture in three panels. The whole plan of salvation is not to be found in either of the parables by itself, but in all three combined. Some points omitted in any one of them will be found in one of the others. "He spoke this parable unto them."

3-7. *Saying, what man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulder, rejoicing, and when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, 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 repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.*

The shepherd had an extraordinary joy in his flock through the wandering and recovery of that one sheep. If they had all stayed in the fold, and none of them had strayed away, he would have been glad, but there would have been a sort of tameness and sameness about his constant satisfaction with them. But that wandering sheep stirred up other emotions in his heart, and when he had found it, he experienced a new joy, a higher joy than he would otherwise have known! So, though sin is a great evil, yet it has been overruled by God in such a way as to introduce a new joy into the universe. Songs of praise that would never have made the angels' harps to ring are now heard in paradise! There would never have been any repentance if there had never been any sin—and the love of the great and good Shepherd towards wandering sheep would never have been revealed if no sheep had ever wandered from the fold. I suppose it was some such feeling as this that caused Augustine somewhat rashly to exclaim, concerning the Fall, "O Beata culpa!"—O happy fault which has thus made manifest the abounding mercy of God! Looked at in one aspect, all sin is an unutterable calamity, but as it has had the effect of displaying still more of the matchless mercy of God in the person of Jesus Christ, we see how God brings forth good out of evil!

The chief point of the parable is the shepherd's joy derived from the finding of the lost sheep. Our Savior needed no other reason for looking after publicans and sinners than the fact that He would get far more joy out of them than He would out of the Pharisees and scribes, even if they were what they pro-

fessed to be, “just persons, which need no repentance.” This first panel of the picture specially sets forth the work of the Son of God. Why was not the Father’s work put first, as the Trinity is, “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”? Why is it, also, that in the Benediction, Paul writes, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Why, because the love of Christ is the first thing that the sinner apprehends! Our first Christian experience is not, as a rule, a knowledge of the Holy Spirit or the Father, but, to our consciousness, it is Jesus Christ who is first revealed to us. I think it is for this reason that the work of the Son of God is here set forth first.

8-10. *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she loses one piece, does not light a candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and her neighbors 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 repents.*

As I have already said concerning the lost sheep, there was a new joy over the recovery of the lost silver. The woman always rejoiced over the pieces of silver, but that one particular piece had been the cause of new joy—the joy which is experienced whenever the sorrow of loss is outweighed by the joy of finding again that which was lost! Is this woman intended to represent the Church of Christ, and is she thus set before us because the Church is the great agent under the control of the Divine Spirit, in seeking the lost, carrying the lighted candle of the Word, sweeping with the besom of earnest, faithful preaching, applying the law of the Lord to the conscience of man, and turning everything upside down until, at last, the lost piece of silver is found? If so, this second panel of the picture sets forth the work of the Holy Spirit as worked through the Church of Christ.

11-13. *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 falls to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after—for sin is very rapid in its development, and sinners are often in great haste to get away from God. The young man’s heart was already wrong, or he would not have wanted to be his own master. He was already away in the far country—so far as his heart was concerned—and it was not long before his body followed. “Not many days after”—*

13-15. *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 need. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

Probably that was the best thing he could do for him, and usually, when the world does the best it can for a sinner, it sets him feeding swine. It was the most degrading employment to which a Hebrew could be put, and, in like manner, sin, before it is finished, brings forth degradation on the way to bringing forth death!

16. *And he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: but no man gave unto him.*

“He would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat,” but he could not, for he was a man, and not one of the swine. Worldlings are happy in their own poor way and I, for one, never grudge them their husks. One never craves the slop that is given to the pigs—we let them have their trough as full as they please, and never want so much as a taste of it! So, when sinners are full of worldly joys, we may not envy them, and we may scarcely blame them. Let the swine have their husks. Once, we too would gladly have filled our belly with them—and if we *did not*, it was not because we *would not*, but because we *could not*.

17. *And when he came to himself.* For sin is insanity! He was out of his mind while he was acting so foolishly—“When he came to himself.”

17-19. *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 you, and am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one of your hired servants.*

It was the knowledge that there was plenty in his father’s house that led him back! And you may depend upon it that the preaching of full salvation rich in blessing is a strong inducement to a sinner to cry, “I will arise and go to my Father.” This prodigal son might never have gone back if his father had kept a miserly house with a scanty table. But he knew that even the servants in the kitchen had “bread enough and to spare.” His father never stinted them—they had what they needed, and there was always more than they could eat—so there was no need for his son to “perish with hunger.” In like manner, the ex-

traordinary bounty of God in Christ Jesus—the richness of His free redemption is, I doubt not, the means of bringing many a starving soul to Christ.

The prodigal said that the servants had “bread enough and to spare.” There are some who seem to think that in Christ there is only just bread enough, but we believe that the largest possible idea of the value of His redemption may be indulged and, oftentimes, the thought that first enters the sinner’s ear and heart is that there is “bread enough and to spare,” so why should he not have some of the spare bread, at any rate? That was the way that the prodigal argued. He felt sure that his father could feed another hired servant, so he resolved that he would ask to be engaged in that capacity. Yet you know that he never asked that—his father stopped him before he could make that request.

20. *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him.*

Perhaps before he saw his father—“his father saw him.”

20. *And had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.*

Matthew Henry’s comment on this verse is excellent—“‘His father saw him.’ Here were eyes of mercy. ‘And had compassion.’ Here was a heart of mercy. ‘And ran.’ Here were feet of mercy. ‘And fell on his neck.’ Here were arms of mercy. ‘And kissed him.’ Here were lips of mercy.” It was all mercy from first to last!

21. *And the son said unto him.*

The father kissed his son before he had time to say anything! And divine compassion is swifter even than our prayers.

21, 22. *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him.*

He did not let him finish his prayer with the request that he might be taken on as a hired servant. That part which was legal he stopped with a kiss on his mouth, and then he said to his servants, “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him.”

22-24. *And put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring here 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.*

This, again, was a new joy in that family circle! There was joy when the elder brother was born, and joy when the younger son came into the household—but this joy over his return was one that they never would have known if he had not gone away. So, there is joy to be had even out of sinners. Christ’s objective was to show that, bad as the publicans and other gross sinners were, and despised as they were by the Pharisees and scribes, yet there was joy to be had out of them. By their salvation, the very heart of the great Father is rejoiced!

25. *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.*

The elder brother in our day says, “I do not believe in these revival services. I like regular, orderly proceedings, and I do not approve of these crowds of people coming to hear the Word under such undue excitement as is sure to result.” That elder brother thought he knew a great many things. He did not get carried away by excitement, as other people did—he was too old for that—he was a man of very proper habits, and he liked everything done in a cold orthodox style.

26. *And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

“What are you all doing? Have you gone out of your minds? Why are you all dancing? Who is to pay for that music? You had better have been along with me out in the fields at work. What is the meaning of all this merriment?”

27. *And he said unto him, Your brother is home: and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.*

These servants spoke as some of us have told to others what the Lord has done when souls have been saved—the unregenerate quickened, and those that were far off from God, by wicked works, have come back to Him. We have told it all in the simplicity of our hearts, and have been so glad to tell the good tidings that we felt as if we could keep on dancing to the music while we were telling the story!

28. *And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.*

I never know which to admire the more—the love of the father in going to meet the returning prodigal, or in going out to talk with this coldhearted elder brother. He was a son, but he had not the true spirit of his father—he had fallen into a very wrong state of mind—just like certain Christians I know who have always been very proper, and who have little sympathy with those who have been great sinners.

They seem as if they do not want to see such people as these brought to the Savior. “Why,” they exclaim, “there are girls from the street, and men that have been burglars, and all sorts of rabble being brought into the church!” I have heard such remarks, and I have seen the same sort of spirit displayed in the looks of others who have not liked to say what they thought. Yet they themselves were no better than others by nature, though grace has done much in restraining them from the sin into which others have fallen—and it was wrong for them to talk as if they were sheer legalists, as this Pharisaic elder brother did!

29. *And he, answering, said to his father, Lo, these many years have I served you, neither transgressed I at any time your commandment: and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.*

A Christian of this stamp seems to say to the Lord, “I have been Your child all these years, yet I am still full of doubts and fears. I have none of the high joys that I see these other people have! ‘You never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.’ I am chastened every morning, and I go sighing all the day long. I seem to get but little comfort, yet here are these young folk who have not been saved a week—and they seem to be full of assurance, and they are as happy as ever they can be. Surely, they cannot belong to the tried family of God! How can they be sincere with all that music and dancing? I cannot endure it, for I never had such an experience.”

30, 31. *But as soon as this your son was come, which has devoured your living with harlots, you have killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.*

Think of that, you who are the Lord’s people, but who have fallen into a grumbling state of heart. Are you not always with your Lord, and is not all that He has yours? If you have never had a kid to make merry with your friends, whose fault is that? Your Father never denied it to you. All in His house is yours, so take the good that He provides for you, and rejoice over it, for then you will be in a fit state to go to meet your poor returning prodigal brother, and to welcome him with a smiling face and a glad-some heart!

32. *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this, your brother, was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found.*

After that reply, there was nothing more that could be said, even by the grumbling elder brother.

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END OF VOLUME 49.