

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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A PROGRAMME NEVER CARRIED OUT.

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## A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 6TH, 1897,

DELIVERED BY

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“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.”—Luke xv. 20, 21.

I THOUGHT I would hardly preach a set discourse from this familiar text, but just give you some odds and ends of thought upon these words. You know that there are many people who are in such a low state of mind, and who have such a humble opinion of themselves, that if I bring them a loaf of bread, they will be afraid to eat it; so I have only brought a few crumbs this time, and my hope is that they will say with the Syrophenician woman, “Truth, Lord: yet the little dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.” May any such persons who are here feel able to pick up a stray thought which shall be spiritual food to them, even manna sent from heaven; and, perhaps, when they have eaten one morsel of it, they may then dare to eat more, and yet more, until their souls are satisfied, and they learn to rejoice in the God of their salvation. I am going to take a roving commission, and to ramble about somewhat more than usual; and I shall do so because I know there are many here who are themselves rambling. Perhaps, if I ramble, I may come across them. If I keep along the city road, some of the hedge-birds that are out of the way may get missed; but if I go over hedge and ditch, and say something unusual here and something startling there, it may be that they will wonder how I went just where they happened to be as much as I marvel how they have managed to go where they are.

My one thought at this time is not concerning my subject, but my object. I have not any particular subject, but my object is that some poor prodigal may return to God, that some lost child may come back to the Father's heart, that, in fact, some sinner may repent of sin, and believe in Jesus, and so enter into rest this very hour. I would rather

be the means of saving a soul from death than be the greatest orator on earth. I would rather bring the poorest woman in the world to the feet of Jesus than I would be made Archbishop of Canterbury. There is no honour and no dignity under heaven that can content us unless souls are won for Christ; but if souls be won, we shall care little how the great work was done instrumentally, for God will have the whole of the glory of it.

I. From my text I am going, first, to make this observation, that THE COMING SINNER'S FORECASTS DIFFER VERY MUCH FROM THE FACTS.

When a sinner comes back to God, he generally has a notion of how he is coming back, and what he is going to feel, and what he is going to say, and what he is going to receive; and he fashions in his mind a kind of programme of what he fancies is about to happen. But, so far as my observation has gone, his programmes are generally good for nothing, and his forecasts of what will happen are usually quite mistaken. This forlorn son said, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will ask him to make me as one of his hired servants."

Notice, dear friends, first, that the prodigal's programme was not carried out *with regard to his own prayers*. He did not say in prayer what he had determined that he would say. He did begin to repeat it, but he never finished it. You remember that he resolved to say, "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." That was his intention; but the prayer he actually uttered did not contain that last sentence, he did not cry, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." I suppose that he was going to say it, but his father kissed him on the mouth, and so stopped it. "No, my boy," the father seemed to say, "you shall not even ask to be made a hired servant. I know that humble petition is simmering in your heart, but it shall never come out of your lips, I will not permit you to say that." Perhaps someone here is saying, "I know what I will say to-night when I pray, I know how I will confess my sin, I know what I will ask of God." No, dear friend, you do not. When you come to the real praying, you will find that something very different will occur to your mind. Much of what now suggests itself to you will fly away, and fresh thoughts will come in. Therefore, do not be particular about making up a programme at all. If this son had gone back to his father without having precomposed a prayer, it would have been just as well; and so, if you do but go back with strong desire to the great Father from whom you have wandered, even though you cannot compose a prayer in words, never mind about that. The composition would have been of little value to you if you had been able to make it. Go with your broken heart, and pour out sighs and cries and tears before the Lord. Wordless though the prayers may be, they shall not lack for force and energy to prevail with God.

But the prodigal's programme also broke down, very sweetly and blessedly, *with regard to his father's action*. He had, in his mind's eye, a vision of what his father would do. Possibly he feared that his father would spurn him altogether; but, dismissing that fear, he may have thought, "If my father is very kind indeed to me, he will

at least chide me severely, and then put me into some low position in the household, and bid me seek to retrieve my lost character, and work my way up till, at last, I may be permitted to sit somewhere at the bottom of the table." He had some such notion as that; but his programme went all to pieces, because his father suddenly manifested his intense love to him. He was a great way off, his tears were flowing, and his heart was trembling; yet, in a moment, before he knew where he was, his father's arms were round his neck, and the kiss of love was on his cheek. So, when a sinner is coming to Christ, he tries to fancy what will happen; he says, "I must be in distress of mind, I must be in deep anguish, I must be pleading and crying to God for forgiveness, and so perhaps light will gradually come to me." Then it often happens that, in a single moment, the soul finds perfect peace with God. I should not wonder if, while I am speaking, the Spirit of God should come rushing in to some dry and thirsty soul, and fill it up to the brim with heavenly delight. Multitudes of persons do find peace with God on a sudden. It is not so with all, for God has many ways of working. "The wind bloweth where it listeth;" but have you not sometimes noticed that everything has been very quiet and still, and suddenly you have heard the moaning of the wind, and then, almost before you were aware of it, the clouds were flying before the breeze, like winged chariots? Have you never been on the Thames, in a yacht, when there has come a sudden squall that seemed as if it would upset everything? Well, the Spirit of God can come upon a man just as swiftly as that. The poor soul is dreaming of the way in which he thinks the blessing may come to him; but when it is bestowed by God, it surprises, astonishes, astounds him. Before he expects such boons, sin is forgiven, grace is received, joy fills the heart, and the man is glad with exceeding great joy. May it be so with some of you who are now here! May your programme be broken in that respect by the sudden incoming of unexpected grace!

There is no doubt whatever that this prodigal son expected that he would have to undergo a probation,—that his father would put him in quarantine for a time. He felt that he was not fit to be received back just as he was, that his father could not let him sit at the table the first day he came home; but that he would say to him, "Recollect how badly you have behaved, young gentleman; you have acted so wildly that it will be long before I can think of trusting you again." Instead of speaking thus, the father said, "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." This was done at once, the very first day the prodigal returned. "What!" says someone, "can I be introduced to the highest privileges of Christian communion as soon as I come to Christ?" Yes, that is God's way of welcoming sinners. Look at the dying thief. The very day he repented, he went to Paradise. Though he had been a great sinner until then, Jesus said to him, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Only think of a child of the devil in the morning being changed to a child of God at night, and made to rejoice in Christ Jesus with the gladdest of the saints in

glory. It was after a similar fashion in the case of this younger son. He was to be in no inferior position, he was to be in all ways equal to his elder brother, and in some respects there was even a higher joy concerning him. I wish it might happen to some of you as it did happen to me, one Sunday morning, long ago. I went into the little house of prayer as burdened as ever this forlorn young man could be, but I came out as full of joy as ever that household was when "they began to be merry." Why should it not be so with you also? I have seen my Master give his daintiest feasts to new-comers, and make a festival for raw recruits,—ay, and set upon the tables all the delights of his dearest love to be food for sinners who, but a day or two before, were feeding the swine of their lusts, and indulging in every kind of sin. Oh, the splendour of almighty love, the infinite majesty of the grace of God, to deal thus with the guilty! Your poor programme is no guide at all; you think that God will treat you as men deal with men, but, lo, he dealeth with you after the manner of God! "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy."

So, you see, this prodigal's programme was erroneous, both as to his own prayers and as to his father's action. In like manner, God deals with his returning prodigals exceeding abundantly above all they ask or even think. This fact ought to induce many to come to Christ who are at present afraid to come. You do not know, dear friends, how gracious my Lord is. You would never stand outside his door, if you knew what accommodation he has for the poorest beggar who does but knock thereat. Did you but know the readiness of Christ's heart to move towards the chief of sinners, you would not linger away from him. If you could only imagine how near you are to a heavenly bliss, the like of which you have never tasted, you would cross the border-line at once. If other prodigals could only know what music and what dancing of a celestial kind might soon be all around them, they would not stay with the citizens of this barren country feeding the swine of this world; but they would hasten home to the Father's house and the Father's love. Do not stay away, brothers, because of that foolish programme of yours which makes you fancy that you must feel this and must feel that. God does not save us according to our programmes; he has a far better way of his own. He does not act according to our prejudices or suppositions, but according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

So much for the first observation, that the coming sinner's forecasts differ very much from the facts.

II. My second remark is, that THAT WHICH PREVAILS WITH GOD IS NOT THE COMING SINNER'S PRAYER TO GOD, BUT GOD'S SIGHT OF HIM.

Notice, when the prodigal resolved to return, he promised to himself what he would say to his father; but his father fell on his neck, and kissed him, before he could utter his petition: "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." The utterance of the prayer of the son followed the

display of love on the part of the father. The reason why the father acted with such wondrous favour to his son was not because the prodigal had prayed, for he had not done so. He had resolved to pray, but he had not actually prayed. His prayer followed the deed of mercy done by his father, and the cause of that mercy was that his father saw him. Do notice that his father saw him, and therefore had compassion on him. His father saw him, and therefore ran to him. His father saw him, and therefore fell on his neck. His father saw him, and therefore kissed him.

What did the father see? Long before the prodigal saw his father, his father saw him; and, first, *he saw his misery*. Suppose that it were your own boy, you who have children. Suppose that, somewhere in this crowd, perhaps near the door, you should see that son of yours who long ago ran away from you. Possibly he has been far away at sea; that might not be to his discredit, but, alas! he has also been living a very loose and sinful life. You have enquired for him, you have advertised for him, but you have not been able to find him. Suppose that you should to-night stumble on him all in rags, lean, cadaverous, consumptive, ready to die. I am sure that you would not begin enquiring what he had done, or where he had been, or anything of the sort. It would be the very sight of his awful misery, the lines of his sorrow and sickness, that would at once touch your heart. As you would look at him, you would see his misery, and you would also see *his relationship to you*. You would ask, "Is that really my boy? Is that my son?" When you had reckoned him up, and perhaps his mother at your side had said, "Yes, that is our John, I am sure it is," there would be no further delay, your heart would have compassion, and you would be ready to fall upon his neck, and kiss him in the Tabernacle just as he is. I knew a good minister whose name happened to be a Jewish one; we will say, "Benjamin." However, he was not a Jew; but one day there called upon him a venerable Israelite, who fell at once upon the minister's neck, and said, "O my son, my dear lost son!" The good man looked at him, and said, "I do not understand what you mean, sir." The Jew replied, "Years ago, I had a son who became a Christian, and I disowned him; and I have always lamented for him ever since. I have hunted the world for him, I have advertised for him, and now at last I thank the God of Abraham that I have found him." The good minister had to say, "My dear sir, I am very sorry for you, but I am obliged to rob you of your comfort. I am not a Jew; I am a Gentile. My father long since went to be with God. You have made a mistake." So the poor old Jew went down the stairs broken-hearted because he had not found his son. It does not matter whether a man is a Jew or a Gentile: he loves his boy, does he not? Why, because we are men, we cannot bear to see our offspring in sickness and sorrow and poverty; and though they may have broken our hearts by their sin, yet they have not broken our hearts off from love to them.

It is just thus that God looks towards you, O penitent sinner! It is not because you pray, it is not because of anything in you; but it is because he sees your sin, and sees your misery, and sees in you as a returning penitent a child of his heart, one whom he has loved with

an everlasting love, one for whom he gave his Son to die; and because he sees this in you, therefore he falls upon your neck, and manifests himself in infinite love to you. I have put this truth, I hope, very plainly; but to any poor soul who says, "I cannot pray," I would answer, "Suppose you cannot, that is no reason why the Father should not run, and fall upon your neck, and kiss you." "But, oh! I cannot put words together: I have tried, but failed to do so." Do you not see that this father kissed his son before the prodigal had said a word? Do you not perceive that very clearly in the narrative? The prayer, truly, had been concocted in his own heart; but he had not uttered it. He never did utter all of it; but his father had kissed him, and blessed him, before he had spoken a single word. So, it is not your prayers, it is not your feelings, it is not anything in you that will save you; it is the great heart of God who loves you that is your highest hope and the real ground why you should be saved. Would to God you could believe this, and find peace with him through Jesus Christ his Son even now!

III. Now I want to make a third observation, which is, that THE FASHION OF PRAYER MATTERS LITTLE SO LONG AS IT IS TRUE PRAYER.

This young man had intended to pray a *contradictory prayer*. Notice what his prayer was; it makes me smile as I read it. Listen: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, 'Father,'" and so on, "I am not worthy to be called thy son." Why then did he call him "Father"? So there is often a beautiful inconsistency about a true penitent's prayer; he puts God in his right place by calling him "Father," yet he does not dare himself to get into his right place to be called a son. But, surely, if I may call God "Father," I may call myself "son," for the relationship necessarily exists on both sides if it exists at all. Ah, poor sinner, I daresay your first prayer is full of blunders; but that does not matter so long as your heart is in it. The Lord knows how to put our prayers together, and take all the contradictions out of them; he understands the meaning of our sighs and our groans.

"To him there's music in a groan,  
And beauty in a tear."

Notice, too, that the prodigal's prayer was a *confession rather than a prayer*: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." You see, he does not ask for anything; he just acknowledges his guiltiness and his unworthiness. It is only part of a prayer, a one-legged prayer, as it were; but, blessed be God, he accepts limping prayers. The oddest, strangest, most singular prayers that ever were prayed, so long as the heart of the man is in them going towards the Father, shall not be refused.

I am going to read you some Scriptures to comfort those of you who are afraid you cannot be saved because you cannot pray. Have you ever noticed what is regarded as prayer according to the Word of God? David says, in the twenty-second Psalm, "Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" So that roaring is prayer, when the heart is so sad that it cannot use words, when it rather roars like a wild beast than speaks like a human being.

Some of you know what it means to get into such a state of misery that you dare not speak, and yet cannot be silent; to be so distracted that you cannot think consecutively, you cannot read your own thoughts, and do not know how to shape them before God, so that your utterance is more that of the roaring of a wounded and dying animal than the praying of a sensible, intelligent man. Yet even that is prayer, and God accepts it as prayer.

Cries also are prayers. In the same twenty-second Psalm, at the second verse, we read: "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." This is rather the cry of pain that comes from a child, than the intelligent expression of the thoughts within the soul. But have you never known, dear friend, what it is to be in such distress, even as a man, that you wish you could get alone, and weep? The tears, perhaps, have refused to come, and you have sat down and said, "I am lost: I am lost. Ah, me! What will become of me, O my God?" Such crying as that, when you can hardly get the words out, is the best praying in the world. It is only "Oh!" and "Ah!" and "Would that!" and all manner of broken ejaculations and strange expressions; yet those are prayers such as God hears and answers.

I will give you another text to show that prayer may sometimes take the shape of a cry. In Psalm lxix. 3, we read: "I am weary of my crying: my throat is dry." So crying is prayer, even hoarse crying, when at last the throat becomes so dry that not a word can be uttered. But that is not all, for breathing may also be praying. In the Book of Lamentations, in the third chapter, at the fifty-sixth verse, we find this singular petition, "Hide not thine ear at my breathing." The man cannot speak, his soul is too full. If he looks through heaven and earth, he cannot find a word that he can utter; but quick and hot are the breathings of his life, which seems as if it would ebb away. Yet that is true prayer. Some of the best prayer that ever reaches the ear of the Lord God of Sabaoth is just like that, the breathing of agony when the very life seems to be expiring. As everything that hath breath is to praise Jehovah, so let everyone who has breath feel that he can pray, for even breathing may be prayer.

Yes, and when you cannot breathe, what do you do then? Why, when a man grows short of breath, then he pants. That again is prayer. Hear how David puts it in Psalm xlii. 1. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!" You know how the stag that has been hunted longs to lave its smoking flanks in the water brooks, and to take a deep draught from the cooling stream, for it seems to be burning within like an oven. There it stands, and pants to find the water; its whole soul seems to go up and down as it pants. Well, when you cannot breathe, when you feel as if that strong breath that I mentioned just now cannot be reached by you, you can pant. "I opened my mouth and panted," says David. Well, that again is some of the best prayer that God ever hears. Do not be afraid, therefore, that you cannot pray, if even panting is prayer.

Yet further, in the sixty-ninth Psalm, at the third verse, David says, "Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God;" and in the fifth Psalm, third verse, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look

up." So, you see, prayer may take another shape; looking up may be a prayer. I have read of an old saint who usually spent a whole hour in the day alone; and being watched and noticed, it was seen that he never said anything, but he stood quite still for an hour, and he was asked, "What, then, is your devotion?" He answered, "I look at God, and God looks at me." And I must confess that I sometimes find it a very high form of devotion to sit quite still, and look up. There is a reverent silence of worship that will sometimes disable the spirit from any other kind of communion. Prayer is—

"The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near."

Oh, you who cannot speak, but yet have your eyes, you can look up; and even in the look there shall be a prayer that God will regard, for he observes which way men's eyes go, and, if their eyes are towards the hills, whence cometh their help, he will bless them!

Next, a moan may be a prayer. Notice this text, Jeremiah xxxi. 18: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus." Moaning is rather the language of a cow than of a man; but, oh, that is a prayer that touches God's heart! We cannot bear to hear a child moan. You mothers who have nursed a sick child at night, I know that it has gone to your heart when you have heard that which you cannot describe otherwise than as moaning; and oh, poor troubled sinner, if you cannot pray, but can only get alone and moan, that is good praying! See how Hezekiah prayed when he was sick; his praying was of this kind, according to Isaiah xxxviii. 14: "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn like a dove." You know how a dove coos, and how pathetic is the mourning of a dove bereaven of its mate. That is good praying, and though to you it seems like chattering, and only making a poor, silly, bird-like noise, it is true prayer when the heart is in it.

I am labouring with all my might to bring these things before you that you may see how simple a matter prayer is, so long as the heart is right with God. So notice, next, that prayer is a sigh. Psalm lxxix, 11: "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee." Further, it is a groan. Psalm cii. 19, 20: "From heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner." The very best prayer out of heaven is a groan. Remember Romans viii. 26: "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,"—groanings with such unutterable pain about them that they are not to be fully expressed in words. These are the very intercessions of the Holy Ghost; therefore our groans are among the very best of prayers.

There is another form of prayer that David was accustomed to use, and that was, spreading out his hands. Psalm lxxxviii. 9: "I have stretched out my hands unto thee;" and, in another place, Psalm cxliii. 6: "I stretch forth my hands unto thee." Sometimes he stood in prayer in this way, as if his heart was saying, "I want to get the blessing, I long to receive it, I am reaching out to thee, my God, for it." How often have I seen a sick man pray like this when he could not do anything else, for words had gone, and the mouth was

stopped and choked, and the brow was covered with a clammy sweat! That is the sort of prayer that God will hear. O sirs, you may go through your liturgies as many times as you please, and perhaps there may not be any prayer in them after all. You may intone them, and accompany them with all the music of your choirs and your organs, and they may fall flat as death before the throne; but a true penitent, who gets alone in his agony, and does but groan, or stretch out his hands, or glance his eyes to heaven, shall never be refused by the great Father above.

There is one other kind of prayer,—there may be a great many more, —but this must suffice for the present. David says, in Psalm vi. 8, “The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.” There again is wondrous power, as if the tears that fell from penitent and earnest eyes were treasured up in the tear-bottle of God. Every tear from his children’s hearts will go to the heart of the great Father, and he will answer the requests of our tears. There is a salt about the tear of a seeking soul that is pleasant unto God. If your tears burn their way down your cheeks, they will burn their way into the heart of God, and you shall get the blessing that you desire.

Now, after all this, I think that I may add that there is nobody here who dare to say that, if he wills to pray, he cannot pray. If there is true prayer in his heart, the expression of it is so simple, so varied, so easy, that everyone must be capable of it; and I do pray that many here may feel that it is not so much how they come, or with what they come, as that, if they do but come with the heart, God will receive them. Dear hearts, will you not come? I wonder whether I am right in the reflection I sometimes make after I have been preaching; I sometimes say to myself, “I think that, if I had heard that sermon when I was seeking the Saviour, I should have found him.” I do not know how to put Christ’s love more plainly, or give the invitation more simply. I wonder souls do not come; and yet I know that you will not come unless my Master draws you. But, surely, he will draw you, he is drawing you. Breathe a prayer to him. He who refuses to pray deserves to be lost. He who knows that God will hear a cry, a breath, a panting, and will not put up any of these,—ah, well, what shall I say of him? Are you choosing your own damnation? Do you really mean to be ruined for ever? Do not so, I pray you. God help you now to come to the great Father, and to find joy and peace in him! “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” “To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” May he turn you, and bless you, and save you, for his great mercy’s sake! Amen.

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## Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

### LUKE XV.

Verse 1. *Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*

It was a motley group—"all the publicans and sinners,"—the riff-raff, the scum, as people sometimes call them: "all the publicans and sinners" drew near unto Jesus "for to hear him."

2. *And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

"See," said they, "what kind of a ministry this must be that attracts all these low people. In what a condition must be the mind of this man who seems pleased to associate with such people as these!"

3. *And he spake this parable unto them, saying,—*

Our Saviour's aim was, to show them that the first object of God is to find the lost, that his first thoughts are toward the guilty and the fallen, that he may bless and save them: "He spake this parable unto them saying,—

4. *What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?*

Is not the shepherd's first thought concerning the one lost sheep? For the time, anxiety about that lost one swallows up the consideration of the ninety and nine that are in safe keeping; and he goes "after that which is lost, until he find it."

5, 6. *And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

He did not say, "Rejoice with me over the ninety and nine that were never lost;" but, for the time, all his anxiety, and, afterwards, all his joy, centred upon the lost one.

7. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

The mercy of God shall seem, as it were, to swallow up every other attribute; and his great heart shall rejoice to the full over repenting sinners.

8. *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?*

The woman's candle and broom and eyes are all for this one lost piece of silver; she does not look just now at the other nine pieces. They are at present left in a safe place by themselves, and she is thinking only of this lost piece.

9. *And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.*

She does not rejoice over the nine pieces which were not lost, one half so distinctly and markedly as she does over the one piece that had been lost, but now is found.

10. *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Our Saviour, you see, is still keeping on the same tack, and showing that he was right in associating with the publicans and sinners, since he aimed

at finding and reclaiming and saving them. He goes on now with a third most beautiful and instructive parable.

11—15. *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 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.*

That was the best the citizen of the far country could do for the prodigal. The devil's best is always bad; what must his worst be? If he sets his favourites the employment of feeding swine, what will he do with them when the time of his favour is over, and they are for ever in his power?

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

Here was the free and easy gentleman, who had spent his thousands without a thought, and now "no man gave unto him." I do not know that this prodigal did spend his living with harlots; the Scripture does not say that he did. It was his elder brother who said that, and he may have made out the case to be even worse than it was. He was simply a waster of his substance in riotous living, and that was bad enough. But I never find that the younger brother tried to set himself right, and repudiate the slanderous accusation of the elder. It was not worth while for him to try to do so, for he was right with his father, and he would get right with his elder brother by-and-by. If you get right with God, my dear friend, even if some Christian people should not believe in you, never you mind about that. Even if they should think you worse than you have been, never mind; if you are right with God, you will be right with them in due time.

17. *And when he came to himself,—*

For he had journeyed into a far country, and he had gone as far away from himself as he had gone from his father; but "when he came to himself,—

17—22. *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,—*

As much as to say:—"Let me hear no more of this, my son; I cannot bear it. You break my heart with the story of your repentance." "The father said to his servants,—

22. *Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:*

"Dress him like a gentleman; do not let it be seen that he ever was in rags: 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.'"

23. *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:*

"Do all that you can to make this poor broken heart happy again, to lift this poor fallen son into the sphere from which he has been so long away. **Make him feel at home; 'and let us eat, and be merry.'**"

24. *For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

I have no information that they ever left off being merry. The Church of God never ceases to praise and bless the Lord for saved sinners. If you come to Christ, dear friend, you will set bells a-ringing that will never leave off throughout eternity : "They began to be merry."

25, 26. *Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

Perhaps he was not very musical, and did not care much for joy and delight ; he may have been a hard-working, plodding man, but not a happy one.

27, 28. *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 : therefore came his father out, and intreated him.*

I scarcely know where the father's grace is the more seen, in falling on the neck of the younger son, or in going out to intreat this elder son, who was in a pet because the returned prodigal had been welcomed so kindly.

29. *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment : and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends :*

He seems to say, "I have had no joy of religion ; I have been a good, steady, moral person, but my soul has had no high delights."

30. *But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

"Not even a little lamb or kid of the goats for me ; but a fatted calf for him !" So some still say, "There has been a revival, and some of the worst people in the parish have been brought to Christ ; and we, who have always gone to church, and always were moral and upright, have not had half the joy of these new converts. No fuss has been made over us ; all the rejoicing is over the returning prodigals." Do you see your portraits, any of you ? If so, may you soon be set right by the only One who can make you what you ought to be !

31. *And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

"Everything I have is yours. If you have not had the kid you spoke of, it was your own fault ; you might have taken it if you had pleased. The whole house is at your disposal. I never denied you anything. 'All that I have is thine.'"

32. *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad :*

See, the younger son did not speak for himself ; there was no need for him to do so. His father spoke for him. What a blessed Intercessor, what a wondrous Advocate we have with our elder brethren ! We may well leave them alone ourselves, for he will bring them right : "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad :"

32. *For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.*