

Going Away and Coming Back

Harmony M.B.C., November 30, 2014

Robert P. Myers

I. **Luke 15:11-12** And he said, A certain man had two sons: **12** 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.

- I believe that we as the Lord's people begin to get into spiritual trouble as soon as we begin to think of running our own lives independent of the Lord. That is, we set ourselves up for spiritual trouble when we begin to take the grace, mercy, peace, prosperity, freedom of choice, and options available to us for granted and begin to treat it as something that we have ownership over instead of remembering that the Lord has made all these things available to us as responsible children.
 - As a teenager, my life began to go astray as soon as I began to use the freedoms that the Lord gave me to make decisions and do things that I decided, from a fleshly viewpoint, were the things I wanted to do. Obviously, my choices were going to be in favor of fleshly things.
 - This young man in our illustration is beginning to do just that here.
 - Have we noticed that the Lord pointed out in this account that it was the younger of the two sons who decided that he wanted to handle everything for himself? Folks, our young believers are the most likely targets for being tempted to assume that they can handle things without God.
 - Almost every one of us have made the wry joke of saying, "when I was younger, I thought I knew everything."
 - I hope we can all see that this kind of independent, self-sufficient, arrogance by this young man did not result in him ending up cut out of his dad's possessions. This is grace and forbearance at work.
 - Can we see that the spiritual lesson here is that our bad behavior does not get us disowned, nor does it result in us being divorced from God? Notice that it is said that this dad "divided unto them his living."
 - The scripture does not identify what is given to them as "THEIR inheritance," but rather "HIS living."
 - Just like kids sometimes forget that an inheritance from their parents is made up of possessions owned by those parents, so the Lord's children sometimes forget that everything they are and everything they have is part of what is the property of God. It seems like the Lord worded this verse here to remind us of this fact.
 - This is an important point when people begin to get the idea that they are totally independent from the Lord...or at least partially independent of the Lord.

II. **Luke 15:13** 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.

- We don't have any record from Jesus about what went on in this young man's head during the "not many days" here, but because we see what happened after "not many days" from the time the son felt himself to now be independent, we can make some assumptions that fit with the human mind:

- When a person starts down that road of independent thinking; when he begins making decisions about what he will do with his life without consulting the guidance of God, he will begin to distance himself from the Lord; this distancing will happen without a person being able to see the slow but certain waning of his interests about staying around his Father's premises
 - When the Lord's people have drifted far enough from the Lord and become enveloped by the world, they are truly in a far country
 - Any of you who have ever been in a far country when it was not because you were a tourist, probably know how displaced one can feel in such a place. I believe that despite the drifting and independent thinking of the Lord's people that takes them to a far country, they feel displaced...maybe even alone sooner or later...in that place. That's because the far country called "the world" IS an alien place for the Lord's children.
- The young man descended toward bankruptcy in that place. I hope we can all see that this illustration is about how the Lord's people will be stripped, little by little, of all their spiritual wealth when fleshly independence takes them to a worldly lifestyle.
 - Before the Lord broke my heart and brought me back to Himself, I had lost practically all spiritual vigor, the spiritual awareness, the spiritual behavior, even the spiritual thinking; it seems now, as I look back on it that all I had left at the end of my independent living was the memory of my Father's love and a faint memory of the joy that I had known while at home.
- This verse says the young man wasted his substance in riotous living. Because we usually associate riotous living with the idea of wild nights, big parties, continually doing those crazy things, we usually miss the lesson in this phrase for children of the Lord who don't go wild in the ways of the world, but rather just take their Christian life and set out on their own course without consideration for the Lord and the Lord's principles and rules. It will help us to understand that riotous living here easily stands for any kind of living where the interests of the Lord are ignored; a life where the personal preferences of the individual child of God take precedence over what the Lord would want from a believer.

III. **Luke 15:14** And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

- Sooner or later, the Lord's vagrant children come to the place where they experience the fact that the world is a place of spiritual famine. With no spiritual input of any kind from the world, the Lord's people find themselves not only spiritually bankrupt, but spiritually starving. The problem is that when a person gets to this place they are usually still not aware that spiritual starvation is at the door.
- They say that some deep sea divers have intense feelings of euphoria when they are near unconsciousness from oxygen depletion. In this state of feeling they think they are fine, and the actual bad state that they are in is not apparent to them at all.

IV. **Luke 15:15-16** And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. **16** And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

- "Joined himself to a citizen of that country" - Still thinking independently, when spiritual starvation sets in, a person who has come to this place of want will still look for some way to get what he lacks by looking to the citizens of the world and their resources

- “Joined himself to a citizen of that country” - Hooking up with the lost community or with lost people is never productive for a child of God
- “sent him into his fields to feed swine” - The child of the Lord can expect further spiritual degradation from the kind of contact with the world that this represents, and it will be the lost community that will provide the means for it. (This story is about a Jewish man to whom hogs are unclean)
- “he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat” - because of the archaic language here, we sometimes miss the message in it - the message is that the young man would **have liked** to have filled his belly with the husks the hogs left...which means he wasn't able to...and that is the spiritual message for the Lord's people. There is never anything coming from the world that will fill our spiritual hunger and therefore, when the Lord's people try to live off of what is available in the world, they will continue to be in a condition of spiritual starvation.

V. **Luke 15:17** And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

- The most merciful and kind thing that the Lord ever does to one of His children when he has gone astray through independent thinking and independent action is to provoke that believer to have a reality check with himself.
- Folks there is a kind of self-reliance as we work our way through this life that is commendable. But this is not it...an independent and rebellious attitude about how we will live our lives will be sure to bring us to spiritual poverty
- This phrase, “when he came to himself” means to face up to what we are doing and how we are doing it.
 - Back in the 60's Kenny Rogers came out with a song called, “I Just Dropped In to See What Condition My Condition was In.” In that song there is a stanza that makes me think of this time in the life of one of the Lord's wayward children, because those lines contain the same almost hopeless, almost gone description that I think fits with where such a person is at this time:
 - I pushed my soul in a deep dark hole and then I followed it in
 - I watched myself crawling out as I was a-crawling in
 - I got up so tight I couldn't unwind
 - I saw so much I broke my mind
 - I just dropped in to see what condition my condition was in
 - It is also a reality check about the bankrupt spiritual condition a person is in and a time of sudden awareness of the richness of spiritual things that exists back at home with God (“bread enough and to spare” vs. “I perish with hunger”)

VI. **Luke 15:18 -19** I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, **19** And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

- Out of a heaven-sent reality check comes repentance for our silly, and independent actions.
 - When this happens, we are able to see clearly just what we are **not** worth
- I believe that it is pride and a false sense of how great we are that causes us to begin to think that we can run our own lives the way we want to and make a great success out of it.

- It is a clear view of our Lord that enables us to find humility and be done with the inflated sense of our own value, and be done with the idea that we can run things by ourselves.

VII. **Luke 15:20 - 21** 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. **21** 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.

- I hope we all can see that admitting to the Lord that we have been wrong takes more than just sitting around and thinking about what we will do. In v. 19, the young man reviewed what he would do, but here, we see him acting. The bible teaches us that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- We should also be very aware that the Lord is able to recognize the slightest action coming from a change of attitude inside us. I believe that the moment our hearts arise and approach the Lord, He is instant in His acceptance of our action and what is in our hearts.
- Repentance in us is like a flash of light to our Lord. He stands ready to receive us the moment the proof of that repentance is shown by us
- Do we notice here that the young man makes no bones about the fact of his offense (I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight)
- I want us to notice one more time the humility that has come to this young man: “am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

VIII. **Luke 15:22-24** But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: **23** And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; 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.

- In this father’s response we see some truths about the Lord and His view about His children:
 - The acceptance by the Lord of His children who wander is not tinged or colored by Him because of their mistakes (v. 22 - best robe; ring on hand, shoes on feet)
 - Heaven’s rejoicing over one of the Lord’s children making things right is not diminished or trimmed down because of the fact that they have been wrong. (Doesn’t this say that the focus of the Lord is on the gladness and the celebration, not what went on in the past, when wrong is made right by believers.)
- Some folks have assumed that because **verse 24** declares that the man’s prodigal son was dead that this can’t possibly be about saved people. The bible teaches that there is a kind of “being dead” which applies to the Lord’s people when they are caught up in a lifestyle where everything is about them and the involvement in the things of the world.
 - In 1 Timothy 5, Paul is instructing Timothy about teaching the church how to properly select widows as candidates to be taken care of by the church and for the work they could do in serving the congregation. In that guidance, he points out that young widows were not to be put in this group because they would probably remarry and then give their energy to their husbands and homemaking. He then points out that those like that who might be set apart as servants of the church would be of no use for service when that happens, and he goes on to say (**verse 6**) that those who would move off into a lifestyle of living in pursuit of the human pleasure of such a lifestyle as a result of abandoning the service of the Lord would be “dead while they live that way.”

- Now, while we can see by reading his guidance that he was not condemning any young widows for remarrying, he was specifically referring to a condition that certain lifestyles bring. Those young widows would be detached from, separated from, not involved or present in this work of the widows that Paul was writing about.
- In a similar way, this young man had been absorbed and consumed by pursuit of another lifestyle out in the world, and was dead as far as the service to, and contact with, his father was concerned. And he was most certainly lost to him.
- When the Lord's children become absorbed with the things of the world, they are the same as dead to the service of God.
- When they take on a life style that is independent of God (as far as they are concerned), they are lost to the service of God.
- There was a season when the apostle Peter was dead to the service of God - Jesus spoke to him (**Luke 22:31-32**) and told him that Satan desired him that he might sift him as wheat and that He had prayed for him that his faith fail not. Then he told him that when he was converted (the word carries the idea of reverting) to strengthen his brethren.
- Where was Peter in spirit when he denied the Lord?
- Where were the other apostles when they forsook Him at Gethsemane and fled?