

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

in parallelism with *hands*. Probably the corruption in reality lies deeper, and is beyond the reach of the emendator's hand.

26. Margin : הַרְרֵי־עַד, *ancient mountains* (see Deut. xxxiii. 15; Hab. iii. 6), for הַרְרֵי עַד, *my progenitors* (lit. *my conceivers*), *unto*, the next word מְצַוֶּנָה being derived from צוה, and taken in its usual sense of *desire*, instead of being derived from צָוָה *to mark out, circumscribe*, Num. xxxiv. 7 f. (cf. for the form מְצַוֶּנָה from צָוָה), and explained as *limit, utmost bound*. This reading is represented in LXX. ὑπερίσχυσεν ὑπὲρ εὐλογίας ὀρέων μονίμων κ.τ.λ. ; and a trace of it is found, side by side with the other reading *my progenitors*, in the rendering of the fragmentary Jerusalem Targum.

l. 11. *Abel* means a *grassy place, or meadow*, and occurs similarly in other geographical names (e.g. Num. xxxiii. 49; Jud. vii. 22; xi. 33). It has no etymological connexion with *ebel*, mourning.

S. R. DRIVER.

THE LOST SHEEP AND LOST PIECE OF MONEY.

LUKE xv. 1-10.

THE heathen philosopher Seneca made a practice of dining with his slaves, and when challenged for an innovation so directly in the teeth of all customary proprieties and so offensive to the Roman mind, he defended himself by saying, that he dined with some because they were worthy of his esteem, and with others that they might become so. The action and its defence were alike admirable, and read a salutary lesson to the aristocrats of Rome. But it was even a greater shock to the Pharisees, and if possible even more unaccountable, that Jesus should prefer the society of notorious sinners to their own irreproachable manners

and decorous conversation. They were honestly surprised and nonplussed by His treatment of these abandoned characters. They could not understand why a teacher of holy life, instead of frowning upon the notoriously profligate, should show a preference for their society. Our Lord's explanation is ample and thorough. It was of extreme importance that His demeanour towards sinners should be made perfectly intelligible, and that its reasonableness should be put beyond a doubt. He devotes, therefore, the three Parables recorded in this chapter to this purpose.

It is perhaps worth remarking, that on one point He felt that no explanation was required. Even the Pharisees did not suspect Him of any sympathy with sin. These critics of His conduct had not failed to remark that in His presence the daring profanity and audacious license of wicked men were tamed. They could not but remark that into these doubtful companies He carried an influence that quite overmastered the habitual manners and tendencies of the degraded creatures among whom He so unostentatiously took His place. They never suspected Him of any desire to be initiated in the mysteries of crime, nor was any one blind enough to fancy He had some secret liking for the talk and experiences of the vicious. When Samuel Johnson late one night found a poor woman lying on the streets of London, exhausted with want, disease and poverty, and carried her home on his back, and nursed her with all tenderness and sought to put her in a virtuous way of living, no one misconstrued his motives. It was seen to be the Christ-like act of a simple, great, and charitable nature. But while the contemporaries of our Lord did not suppose He had any personal relish for sin, they still held it to be an unaccountable if not blameworthy feature of His conduct, that He received sinners and ate with them. For as we sometimes find ourselves laying to a man's charge that which is his chief claim to our regard, and

citing that as his weakness which in reality is his strength, so did the Pharisees and Scribes bring against our Lord as a damning accusation that very habit which is His eternal praise: "This man receiveth sinners." The most desolate and broken soul cannot desire any better account of the Saviour's work than is thus given by those who were reading off the most obvious facts of His life.

Those who so narrowly criticized our Lord's conduct might have seen its reasonableness had they been able to look at it from another point of view. With equal surprise they might have exclaimed: "Sinners receive this man and eat with Him." Among them it was a new thing that the godly should consort with sinners; but surely it was equally novel that sinners should seek the company of One whose conversation was instinct with purity and breathed of heaven. Could the people recall many instances in which outcasts and profligates had been seen longing to talk with a man whose words were all of purity and righteousness? These dissolute and lawless characters could themselves have explained the change. They were attracted to Jesus, because together with unmistakable sanctity, and even somehow appearing as the chief feature of His sanctity, there was an understanding of the sinner's position and a hopefulness about him which threw a hitherto unknown spell over them. Separate from sinners, as they had never before felt any one to be, He seemed to come closer to their heart by far than any other had come. He had a heart open to all their troubles. He saw them through and through, and yet showed no loathing, no scorn, no astonishment, no perplexity, no weariness. Instead of meeting them with upbraiding and showing them all they had lost, He gave them immediate entrance into His own pure, deep, efficient love, and gladdened their hearts with a sense of what they yet had in Him.

Therefore men whose seared conscience felt no other

touch, who had a ready scoff for every other form of holiness, admitted this new power and yielded to it. Old sinners broke down before Him, and with tears and simplicity as when they had sobbed out their first fault on their mother's bosom, repented of their weary life of sin. Men from whom the Roman lash could draw no word of confession ; men whom society had branded as outcasts and who flung back on society a scorn as contemptuous as its own ; men who had long since abandoned all belief in goodness and who delighted in showing their disbelief, were not ashamed even in the public streets, to own to Him their sin and to supplicate His mercy. Women whose vanity and light-heartedness had led them to self-loathing and despair, who forced a ghastly gaiety from hearts that lay cold and heavy as stone in their breasts, found to their astonishment that Christ did not shrink from them, but spoke to them with a tenderness and a hope which were new sounds to them. The disheartened, the polluted, the ruined, the degraded came to Him, because in Him they found an inexhaustible compassion. He did not give advice ; He did not warn ; He did not send them away with minute directions for godly living ;—there were plenty who could do that—He *received* them, opened to them His heart, and gave them to feel through their whole being that they were loved and thought of by this highest and purest of persons.

The contrast between this new attitude of a holy person towards the sinner and that to which men had commonly been accustomed, has been finely described in the following words : “He who thought most seriously of the disease held it to be curable ; while those who thought less seriously of it pronounced it incurable. Those who loved their race a little made war to the knife against its enemies and oppressors ; He who loved it so much as to die for it, made overtures of peace to them. The half-just judge

punished the convicted criminal ; the thoroughly just judge offered him forgiveness. Perfect justice here appears to take the very course which would be taken by injustice."

It is this then that calls for explanation. And it is explained by our Lord in three Parables, each of which illustrates the fact that a more active interest in any possession is aroused by the very circumstance that it is lost. The sheep that is lost is not on that account disregarded by the shepherd, but receives for the time greater attention than those which remain in the fold. The piece of money that has gone amissing becomes on that very account of greater immediate importance to the woman than all she has safe in her jar in the cupboard. If one of a family turns out ill, it is a small mitigation that all the rest turn out well ; it is after the lost the parent's heart persistently goes. So is it with God. The very circumstance that men have strayed from Him evokes in Him a more manifest and active solicitude in their behalf. The attitude of God and of Christ towards sinners is reduced to the great principle, that anything which is lost and may be regained exercises our thought more and calls out a more solicitous regard than a thing of equal value which rests securely in our possession.

This is the principle which these Parables are intended to illustrate : that with God as with men that which is lost occupies, for the time and until restored, more of His thought and provokes clearer and larger manifestations of His love than that which has not been lost or is already restored. The figures used for the purpose of illustration must not be pushed too far. They are not so much images of our state as instances of the application of one common principle. They are instances of lost articles ; that is all. It is merely accidental that there is a resemblance between the silly sheep that heedlessly nibbles the sweet grass that lies before it and so crops its way from spot to spot of

pasture till it is utterly lost, and the man who looks only to present gratification and so strays on with the same foolish thoughtlessness and unconsciousness of danger, and is only awakened to see how near akin thoughtlessness is to wickedness by finding himself involved in inextricable difficulties and threatened with danger of the most alarming kind. In like manner it may be said that we resemble lost coin that has fallen out of circulation and is lying unused and being gradually tarnished, defaced, and buried in dust; for we too have been issued with the image of our Maker upon us, but are gradually suffering it to be defaced and are dropping aside from all serviceable living. But the points of the comparison for the sake of which these illustrative instances are introduced are simply the lostness of the sheep, the money, and ourselves alike; the consequent concentration of attention on what is lost; and the joy of finding it again.

I. The first point, then, suggested by these parables is, that God suffers loss in every sinner that departs from Him. To the Pharisaic mind this was a new light on the character of God. The Pharisee himself trusted little to tenderness, much to rigid law. Naturally he thought of God as also standing upon His rights, enforcing His will by compulsion, and with equanimity punishing and driving into permanent exile those who have strayed from Him. It is a revelation to them to hear that the lostness of the sinner is God's loss; that God suffers more than the sinner in the separation. For God loves the sinner and this love is wounded, whereas the sinner has no love for God that can be wounded by separation. The silly sheep is quite satisfied with its state, while the shepherd's heart beats fast with anxiety about its possible fate. It is not the son but the mother whose hair turns grey with slow anguish as she marks the increasing frequency with which he is absent from her fireside, and how he is becoming lost to her. So

it is God who suffers and not the heartless sinner, who, without a thought of the wound he is inflicting, goes his own wretched way and courts the destruction which Christ died to save him from. All the brokenheartedness of parents who year by year watch the failure of all their efforts to lead some misguided child to well-doing; all the crushing anguish of wives who see their husbands slowly hardening in vice and sinking out of reach of their love; all the varied misery that love must endure in this sinful world, is after all but the reflection of what infinite Love suffers in sympathy with every sinner who spurns it and chooses death. Look at the sorrow of God in Christ, and say whether the loss God suffers in your separation from Him be true or feigned.

This was what the Pharisees had wholly left out of account, that God loves men and mourns over every ill that befalls them. And this is what we find it so hard to believe. It is only very slowly we come to believe even in human love. With difficulty we believe that there are persons to whom it would give real pleasure to make a sacrifice for us. How impossible is it for a child to understand the love his parent has for him. How few of us conceived anything of the tenderness and intensity and persistence and self-sacrifice of parental love, till we ourselves grew up and had it interpreted to us by our own feelings. In some of us, grief for lost friends or parents has been embittered by the thought of what we might and would have done for them, had we only sooner learned what we have since discovered of their love for us. Are none of us preparing for ourselves a similar remorse by our neglect of that Love which is the true spring of all other affection, and itself greater than all?

These Parables thus bring us face to face with the most significant and fertile of all realities, God's love for us. This love encompasses you whether you will or no. Love

never asks leave ; it cannot ; it enters like sunshine, and often where it seems much out of place. You may destroy all love to God in your own soul, but you cannot destroy His love for you. It persists, because it is love. It waits patiently for requital ; it humbles itself to be often slighted, often misconstrued, often refused. Can it be true that God loves you ; that you yourself are connected by this most fruitful of ties to the eternal God ? Surely there is no question that may more worthily engage the attention ? It will not do for a man to persuade himself he is honourable and rightminded, if he is making no account of this expenditure of love upon him. This is no question of casuistry that plain men need not trouble their heads about. It is no question of doctrine which a man may believe or disbelieve and still remain sound at heart. It is a question regarding our conduct towards a Person, a question that touches what lies deepest in our life and character.

II. Secondly, these Parables suggest that the very fact of our being lost excites action of a specially tender kind toward us. God does not console Himself for our loss by the fellowship of those who have constantly loved Him. He does not call new creatures into being and so fill up the blank we have made by straying from Him. He is not a Sovereign who has no personal knowledge of His subjects, nor an employer of labour who can always get a fresh hand to fill an emptied post : He is rather a shepherd who knows His sheep one by one, a Father who loves His children individually. He would rather restore the most abandoned sinner than blot him from his place to substitute an archangel. Love is personal and settles upon individuals. It is not all the same to God if some other person is saved while you are not.

“Thou art as much His care as if beside
Nor man nor angel lived in heaven or earth.”

When men sin, therefore, and fall into difficulties, God

cannot remain indifferent or quiescent. Interference of a direct and special kind becomes necessary. The normal relations being disturbed, and man becoming helpless by the disturbance, it falls to God to restore matters. A new set of ideas and dealings are brought into play. So long as things go smoothly and men by nature love God and seek to do His will, there is no anxiety, no meeting of emergencies by unexpected effort, hidden resources, costly sacrifice. But when sin brings into view all that is tragic, and when utter destruction seems to be man's appointed destiny, there is called into exercise the deepest tenderness, the utmost power of the Divine nature. Here where the profoundest feeling of God is concerned, where His connexion with His own children is threatened, Divinity is stirred to its utmost.

This appears, among other things, in the spontaneity and persistence of the search God institutes for the lost. The shepherd who misses one of his flock does not sit down by the ninety and nine in the pasture, but straightway goes in search of the lost. He does not expect that it will seek him; he goes after it. He does not expect to meet it coming home to him, so that if he had only waited and left it to itself, it would have found its own way back. On the contrary, he knows the recovery of the sheep depends wholly on himself and he prepares himself for trouble, provocation, risk. On him must fall the burden of finding it, of devising means of rescue and of bringing it back to the fold. Yet men sometimes seem to suppose that God is not alive to their dangers, but needs to be aroused to take a livelier interest in their condition and to help them in their strivings against evil. He is thought of as sitting coldly watching our passionate and almost despairing struggles to break away from evil and make our way back to a pure and helpful life; as if He were saying, I will let this sinner learn what it is to have strayed from Me. But

it is not so : God is as truly beforehand with the sinner as the shepherd with the sheep. The initiative is God's ; and all that you desire or do in the way of return to righteousness is prompted by Him. He has already sufficiently shown that He is alive to the emergency and that no trouble is too great, no sacrifice too great, while there is a possibility of saving the human soul.

God's search is also persistent. The woman of the Parable sweeps out every dusty corner ; she shakes out every article of clothing ; she lifts boxes that have not been lifted for years ; she carefully searches drawers where she knows the coin cannot be ; she reads the face of every one who has come near her house for a month ; she exhausts every possibility of finding her piece of money. Possibly she required it to make up a sum for a purchase. Certainly God needs us for some end He has in view. This is not our whole history, that with immense outlay of Divine resources we are restored to permanent rectitude. There must be much beyond, and for this God prepares us now. The experiences of earth, however exalted, do not exhaust the eventfulness of our eternal life. Therefore God seeks us with earnestness as if we were necessary not only to His love but to His purposes. He makes diligent search. He leaves no stone unturned. With active, intelligent, unwearied search, He strives to win the sinner to purity and love. Christ astonished men on earth by the company into which He found His way, and by the affection with which He spoke to low and worthless people ; and so does He still by means less observable, but equally efficient, seek to win men to the recognition of His love and of all the good He makes possible. The shepherd sought "until he found" his sheep ; the woman swept diligently "until she found" her coin. But while God's search is infinitely more persistent, it may be baffled by the cold indifference, the resolute badness of the sinner.

III. The third point illustrated by these Parables is the exceeding joy consequent on the restoration of the sinner. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." The joy is greater, because the effort to bring it about has been greater, and because for a time the result has been in suspense, so that when the end is attained there is a sense of clear gain. The joy of success is proportioned to the difficulty, the doubtfulness of attaining it. All the hazards and sacrifices of the search are repaid by the recovery of the lost. The value of the unfallen soul may intrinsically be greater than the value of the redeemed; but the joy is proportioned not to the value of the article, but to the amount of anxiety that has been spent upon it. So that Christ virtually says to the Pharisees: "You murmur at Me; but if you were in sympathy with heaven you would rejoice with Me. You need no repentance,—at least you think so; and for this very reason I seek to attract those who do. Their state is admittedly precarious, and to win them will be clear gain to the kingdom of heaven. The finding is an intenser joy than the keeping safe, because the loss has been actually felt and is now relieved, the pang of separation has been actually endured and is now swallowed up in the joy of restoration."

To the sinner then, these Parables say, It is your unspeakably happy privilege to give God joy. There is no joy comparable to the joy of successful love; of love, that is to say, not only recognised and returned, but which succeeds in making the object of it as happy as it desires, and does so after many repulses and misunderstandings and hazards. This is God's greatest joy. When God succeeds in securing the happiness, the inward purity and rectitude, and therefore the happiness, of any one who has been estranged from Him, there is joy in heaven. What can more worthily give joy to intelligent beings than the in-

crease of goodness? God's joy is the unutterable joy of the parent who for many years has been anxiously watching his son's growth, his leanings, his temptations, his resolutions, his declensions, his alienations of spirit, and at length sees proof that the lad is wholly sound at heart, that he has chosen the better part and thrown off all vice that clung to him, that he is bent now upon a pure and honourable life, and with his own soul hates the thought of evil, that he has finally abjured the allurements that tempted and bound him formerly, and has in himself that deep principle and those wise and generous dispositions which will guide him in all circumstances and in all companies. This joy you have it in your power to give to God. There is a joy which no one but yourself can excite in God, a joy over your repentance, over your return to good; a joy therefore which none but yourself has the humble glory of stirring in the mind of God.

In this joy the angels are represented as sharing. Their experience of the blessedness of life with God gives them sympathy with all who enter that life. They know the happiness that lies before every one who yields himself to God's purpose and to God's love, and therefore they rejoice. And if it be true that the conversion of one soul be so reasonable a ground of joy to those who are merely spectators, what unspeakable gladness ought it to bring to those who themselves experience it. Have you ever had such happiness that you would deem it reasonable that all heaven should rejoice with you in it? Yet there is such happiness open to you. Uninteresting, solitary, monotonous and unobserved as your life may seem, it is, if there be truth in these words of the Lord, an object of intensest interest to God and angels. With all its evils, its fears, its misery, it may be lifted to so true a harmony with the ever-living God that those pure and discerning spirits who see it, cannot forbear rejoicing over it with well-grounded satisfaction.

If God with all heaven is thus in sympathy with us, defeated in our defeat, triumphing in our victory; if the cause of love and moral order is one throughout the universe, we have every encouragement to play our part well. It is no short and easy passage of arms we are called to; we are wearied and often overcome by the constant accompaniment of sin, weakness and folly in all we do; but in all this evil and conflict there is material for victory and joy. Are you weighted by nature with a poor craven spirit, a vain selfish heart, sordid or gross passions, a feeble inconstant will, a nature that often causes shame? Humbly recognise all this as what you are actually called to master; do not waste your energies envying those who have a better nature and an easier task, but face the conflict that actually awaits you and carry into it the assurance that every stroke for the right and every defeat of evil you accomplish has an echo of the truest kind in heaven. Remember the greater joy God has in the painful, difficult, penitential return of a lost soul than in the easy righteousness of the naturally pure.

MARCUS DODS.

DEAN CHURCH.

THERE is a mountain which divides the Austrian and the Bavarian Tyrol, the top of which is a narrow, level, undulating ridge about the width of a London pathway, and as easy walking, where you may go on and on for miles. Right and left the ground falls away sharply enough to leave the view clear, and is not steep enough to trouble the nerves. Each side the prospect stretches far. On one side lawns and woods and lakes lead the eye to purple glimpses of the wide horizon of the great plain that is so