



Illustration: The Prodigal Son

A Devotional for the
Week of the Third Sunday after Epiphany.

Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons – who need no repentance.
– Luke 15:7.

Today we will continue the parable of Jesus which we did not conclude yesterday. – Now the elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him "Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." And he was angry, and would not go in; therefore his father came out and entreated him. 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; but as soon as this thy son was come, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." And he said unto him: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

(Luke 15:25-32.)

Here you see how there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance, –need no new repentance after some great fall from grace. Here you see how children of God are assailed by wicked thoughts, and their eye becomes evil because God is so good. Here you see how promptly and most kindly God sets His children right again through His Word and Holy Spirit. And here you see how the children of God must join in the joy which is in heaven over one sinner that repents.

PRAYER. – Lord, my God, I thank You that You have graciously adopted me as Your child and let me dwell with You, so that all that You have is mine and I lack no truly good thing. O my God, this is nothing but mercy which You show me in Christ, my Savior, and of

which I am altogether unworthy. Now when You enliven to new life some poor lost child of sin and take him to Your bosom, then grant that I may not be forgetful of the grace on which alone I subsist, and that I may have no evil eye. And though such dark thoughts assail me, do set me right again, that I, too, may rejoice with You and the holy angels over my brother who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found. Grant this, O merciful God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

Hymn 99, 2.

O the height of Jesus' love!
Higher than the heavens above.
Deeper than the depths of sea,
Lasting as eternity;
Love that found me – wondrous thought! –
Found me when I sought Him not.

MONDAY.

So the last shall be first, and the first, last. – Matthew 20:16.

Another warning parable in addition to that of yesterday. –The kingdom of heaven is like unto a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace and said unto them: "Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you." And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" They say unto him: "Because no man hath hired us." He saith unto them: "Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." So when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward: "Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first." And when they came that were hired about the eleventh

hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying: "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden and the heat of the day." But he answered one of them and said: "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way ; I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?" (Matthew 20:1-15.)

"So the last shall be first, and the first last," said Jesus at the end of this parable. In the kingdom of God nothing but grace avails. And it is God's will, of His great goodness, to make the last equal to the first. And he that, knowing this, forever has an evil eye and would boast of his own pitiful merit, shall be last in such a way that he cannot remain in the kingdom of God. From this may God defend us!

PRAYER. – Lord God, dear Heavenly Father, who from childhood in manifold ways has effectually called and invited us into Your kingdom of grace, as into Your vineyard, I thank You for Your unmerited favor bestowed upon me. And I beg You, that through Your Holy Ghost, I may not only follow Thy voice, but also, trusting purely and solely in the merit of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, continue in Thy grace, until, through the same, I enter eternal bliss. Amen.

Hymn 328.

GRACE! 'Tis a charming sound, | Harmonious to the ear;
Heav'n with the echo shall resound, | And all the earth shall hear.

Grace first contrived the way | To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display | Which drew the wondrous plan.

Grace first inscribed my name | In God's eternal book;
'Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb, | Who all my sorrows took.

Grace led my roving feet | To tread the heavenly road;
And new supplies each hour I meet, | While pressing on to God.

Grace taught my soul to pray, | And made my eyes o'erflow;
'Twas grace that kept me to this day, | And will not let me go.

Grace all the work shall crown, | Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone, | And well deserves the praise.

TUESDAY.

Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. – John 8:11.

In the last autumn of His earthly sojourn Jesus went to the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem. On the day after the feast, early in the morning, He came into the temple. And all the people came unto Him. And He sat down and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they said unto Him: "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest Thou?" This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground, presumably to indicate that it was not His business to interfere with the administration of civil justice. So when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself and said unto them: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground, now, perhaps, to let His simple word take effect. And they, when they heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (John 8, 1-11.)

Here we see the Savior in His official capacity. He did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world. He did not condemn the woman, but met her as her Redeemer. He forgave her sins to her. And He said: "Sin no more." And so He meets us. He forgives us all our sins. We must believe this. And then we must go, and serve sin no more.

PRAYER. – Kind Savior, to me also do You forgive all sins. Of this I am fully assured. Your Law condemns me, my conscience condemns me, men condemn me, – but not You. Now grant me also Your Holy Spirit, to the end that from a heart filled with gratitude to You, I may hate sin, and love and serve You. Forgive my sins to me daily, yes, always, give me daily, yes, unceasingly, Your Holy Spirit, that I may continually hate sin, and love and serve You, kind Savior. Amen.

Hymn 48.

SINNERS, turn; why will ye die? | God, your Maker, asks you – Why?
God, who did your being give, | Made you with Himself to live.

He the fatal cause demands, | Asks the work of His own hands,
Why, ye thankless creatures, why | Will ye cross His love and die?

Sinners, turn; why will ye die? | God, your Savior, asks you – Why?
He, who did your souls retrieve, | Died Himself that you might live.

Will ye let Him die in vain? | Crucify your Lord again?
Why, ye ransomed sinners, why | Will ye slight His grace, and die?

Sinners, turn; why will ye die? | God, the Spirit asks you – Why?
He who all your life-time strove, | Wooed you to embrace His love.

Will ye not His grace receive? | Will ye still refuse to live?
O ye long-sought sinners, why | Will ye grieve your God and die?

WEDNESDAY.

This man went down to his house justified. – Luke 18:14.

Who went down to his house justified? Who had forgiveness of sins? Who was absolved and pronounced entirely free and rid of all his sins? Who thus had the righteousness of God, – who?

Jesus spake the following parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners; unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." – In conclusion Jesus added: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14.)

Now you know who is justified: not he that parades his own righteousness before God, despising others and exalting himself. No, his own righteousnesses are as filthy rags; in these no man can stand before God. And whoever means to boast of them before God shall be abased, rejected, damned. *He* is justified, he ever was and ever shall be justified, who humbles himself, acknowledges his sins, knows that he is an abomination to God, but looks to Christ and, quickened by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel, imploringly says: "God, for Christ's sake be reconciled to me, a sinner; be merciful to me, a sinner!" Thus the worst sinner is justified before God and exalted to the heart of God. And this is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER. – Righteous God, merciful Father, in whose sight nothing in all the world avails anything, except only the blood and death of Your beloved Son, whereby You have established eternal righteousness for all mankind, You who hate all that trust in their own works: I give thanks to Your great mercy and heartily beseech You graciously to keep me from unbelief, pride, and arrogance, as well as from despair and other vices, lest my prayer become an abomination before You, but rather grant that I may take true comfort in the merit of Your dear Son, and honor Him by leading a Christian life: through the same Your dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 325, 2. 3.

Not the labors of my hands | Can fulfill Thy Law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, | Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; | Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in the hand I bring, | Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress; | Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly: | Wash me, Savior, or I die!

THURSDAY.

*The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.
– Luke 19:10.*

Our Lord, when on His way to Jerusalem, where He was to suffer and die, passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, the chief among the publicans, and rich. And he sought to see Jesus – to see who He was: but he could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature. And he climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus; for He was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for today I must abide at thy house." And he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully. – What a blessed hour that must have been for Zacchaeus! – But when the people saw it, they all murmured, saying: "He is gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said unto the Lord: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Thus Zacchaeus proved his faith in the Savior. And Jesus said unto him: – This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:1-10.)

Such is the grace of God in Christ Jesus: the Father draws poor sinners to Jesus through their hearing of Him. Jesus receives poor sinners most kindly, and continues to manifest Himself to them as their Savior and Redeemer. Through the Holy Spirit the poor sinners rejoice in their faith and begin to lead a new life; they are true sons of Abraham, the father of believers. And in such grace God will not be restricted by the enormity of the sins. For the Father has sent the Son, and the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

PRAYER. – Lord, my God, I rest on Your grace, O Heavenly Father, always draw me to Your Son, my Savior. O Jesus, always receive me kindly and give me Your salvation. O Holy Spirit, always make me rejoice in my faith and create a new heart within me. O God, let me never fear nor faint in such faith and trust in You, never let me doubt nor waver, never let me be deceived nor led astray from You. Grant that I may steadfastly trust in Your grace, that I may obtain the end of my faith promised me by Your grace, my soul's salvation, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Hymn 325, 1. 4.

ROCK of ages, cleft for me, | Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood, | From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure, | Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

While I draw this fleeting breath, | When my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown, | See Thee on Thy judgment throne;
Rock of ages, cleft for me, | Let me hide myself in Thee!

FRIDAY.

This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.
– *Matthew 17:5.*

Nothing on earth, dear reader, can possibly be of greater consequence for you than becoming fully assured of the fact that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and your merciful Savior and Redeemer. One thing only can give you this certainty: *hearing and reading His Word.* Recall the story we read on Tuesday of the second week after Epiphany. There God the Father said concerning Jesus: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; *hear ye Him*"

Referring to this, St. Peter writes: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with Him in the holy mount.

We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," (2 Peter 1:16-21.)

Hear, read, and heed the Word of Jesus, the Word concerning Jesus. You will find it in the word of the prophets, who prophesy concerning Him, and in the word of the apostles and evangelists, who proclaim His power and His coming again. That is God's Word, God's Word concerning Jesus, given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Thus, and thus only, will the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your heart: the divine certainty that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and your merciful Savior and Redeemer. For by this Word the Holy Spirit, who is God, works faith within you. And faith is certainty.

PRAYER. – Almighty and eternal God, I thank You that You have given to wretched mankind Your holy Word, the Word concerning Christ, as a bright light for the darkness of our hearts. Grant me, I humbly beg You, Your Holy Ghost, that at all times I heed this Word, that the day may dawn within my heart, and that the true

morning-star may lead me to Christ, until I shall see Him in eternal light. Amen.

Hymn 83, 3. 4.

Thou holy Light, Guide divine, | O cause the Word of life to shine;
Teach us to know our God aright, | And call Him Father with delight,
From error, Lord, our souls defend, | That they on Christ alone attend,
In Him with living faith abiding, | In Him with all their might confiding.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

SATURDAY.

One thing is needful. – Luke 10:42.

Now it came to pass, as Jesus went with His disciples, that He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His Word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him and said: "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me." And Jesus answered and said unto her: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42.)

The one thing needful is, that Jesus' Word be preached and heard. Nothing at all on earth is as important and necessary as this, and, certainly, nothing is more important and more necessary than this. For only through the preaching and hearing of the Word of Jesus is that faith wrought and sustained within us – sustained, I say – wherein we sinners stand before God and are justified and saved. Without this faith, which is sustained only and exclusively through the Word of Jesus, even the best of our works can by no means please God, for without such faith we ourselves cannot please God. So the preaching and the hearing of the Word of Jesus is the one thing needful. Let no one take this from you, O Christian!

PRAYER. – I thank You, my God, that You have graciously given me Jesus' Word, the holy Gospel. Preserve it to me and mine, and to all believers! Let it have free course and increase upon earth! Give to me and all believers Your Holy Ghost, that we may sincerely consider it the one thing needful, and gladly, diligently, and eagerly hear and learn it. Awaken hearts everywhere that heed the Word of Jesus and are thereby converted and saved. For You, God, are most good, and You earnestly want all men to be saved through faith in Christ Jesus, the only Savior. Amen.

Hymn 83, 3. 4.

How were Mary's thoughts devoted | Her eternal joy to find,
As intent each word she noted, | At her Savior's feet reclined!
How kindled her heart, how devout was its feeling,
While hearing the lessons that Christ was revealing!
For Jesus all earthly concerns she forgot,
And all was repaid in that one happy lot.

Thus my longings, heavenward tending, | Jesus, rest alone on Thee;
Help me, thus on Thee depending, | Savior, come and dwell in me!
Although all the world should forsake and forget Thee,
In love I will follow Thee, ne'er will I quit Thee;
Lord Jesus, both spirit and life is Thy Word;
And is there a joy which Thou dost not afford?

These devotions are adapted from *Crumbs* by C. M. Zorn (1914).
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