

Living.

"How to make lives worth living?" The question haunts us every day; It colors the first blush of sunrise; It deepens the twilight's last ray. There is nothing that brings us a clearer pain Than the thought, "We have lived, we are living in vain."

We need, each and all, to be needed, To feel we have something to give Toward soothing the moan of earth's hunger; And we know that then only we live When we feed one another, as we have been fed, From the Hand that gives body and spirit their bread.

The Worth of Lost Things.

BY ALEXANDER MCLAREN, D. D.

"A man is known by the company he keeps" is, like most proverbs, open to qualification. One should know why he keeps such company before pronouncing on the man's character. Jesus, no doubt, preferred associating with "publicans and harlots" to making companions of Pharisees; but his reason was not that vice and coarseness were congenial to him, but that he was drawn by their very vice to save them from it. He kept their company, not because he was like them, but because he was their opposite, and, being so, yearned to restore them and make them like himself. The necessity under which pure love lies, of seeking after and bringing back the impure and loveless, is the lesson of these three priceless parables. The first two are closely connected with each other, and the third, the crown of all the parables, is slightly more separated from them, as is seen by the "and he said" in Luke 15:11, compared with the simple "or" in verse 5. These two teach one lesson, and present the same set of incidents with slight modifications. It may be best to deal first with what is common to both, and then with their differences.

1. The great lessons conveyed by both parables. The first point to be noted is the distinction drawn between the "lost" sheep or coin and the unlost. Clearly Jesus is speaking from the Pharisaic standpoint, and means by the former the publicans and sinners whose "drawing near to hear him" had caused the highly respectable Pharisees to gather their starched skirts about them, and shake their heads over this fresh sign of his low tastes and suspicious affinity for such disreputable society. He does recognize a relative righteousness in the law-abiding Pharisees, and his followers would have been truer to his spirit if they had not talked of the "virtues" of non-Christians as "splendid vices," and ignored the valid distinctions of conduct between cleanly living and profligate persons. True there is a deeper analysis of conduct and character which brings to light that all men "have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," but the two points of view are reconcilable. Humanity as a whole, is "lost," and in other connections Jesus has taught us that. The distinction here drawn may legitimately be applied to the contrast of Jew and Gentile, and to that of man and angels; but we must keep clearly in sight the fact that the distinction in Christ's mind was between respectable, law-observing, and formally devout "church-goers," and the wafers and wasters foul with the stench of gross sins.

But what does "lost" imply? The word has, in conventional evangelical teaching, come to be applied mainly to the future condition of unbelievers who "lose their own souls" in that awful living death. But here it is God who loses his sheep or his coin, and the stress is laid on the thought that men, by their sin, withdraw themselves from his ownership. He possesses them all by virtue of creation, and no sin can break the ties by which he holds us, but he reckons that mere necessary possession as no real ownership. We are his in such a way as to gladden him only when we yield ourselves to him. There must be voluntary, glad, loving submission before his heart counts itself to possess our hearts.

Further, common to both parables is the representation that, as it is with us, so it is with God, that a thing lost becomes more valuable because it is lost. We all know that feeling that some mere trifle, for which we cared little as long as it lay within reach, grows to be much more than a trifle if we lose it. The mother clothes the memory of her dead infant with bright-

ness, and clings to it more than to her living children. Some analogy of such a disposition may reverently be ascribed to the divine Heart. It implies no false estimate of the relative worth of the ninety-and-nine and the one; but it does teach that loss enhances worth even in God's eyes, and since the things lost are persons, that means that his love goes forth in efforts to win them back.

Hence another lesson common to both parables is the divine efforts to recover the lost things. The shepherd's long tramp, the woman's minute search, both reflect, as a tiny mirror may show the sun, the seeking love of God, lavishing care, and what in us would be pains, in tracking and bringing back the lost. But Jesus tells these stories in vindication of his own conduct, so that we have to see in the shepherd and the woman not only a symbol of the love of God, but a revelation of Christ's own yearning desire after the wanderers, and a veiled claim to have rights of possession over us.

Both parables bring out the wonderful, heart-touching thought of God's joy over the restored sinner, which is expressed with clearer emphasis in the phrase in the second that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God" than in the more indefinite one in the first, "joy in heaven." Clearly, the natural interpretation of the former is that it is God's own joy of which the angels are spectators and sharers. The God whom Jesus declares is no impassive deity. The centre of the universe is a heart in which the sense of ownership and the affection of love are the same. God really loses us when we stray from him, and some wave of gladness lifts the face of the great deep when the lost is found. Nor is that wondrous conception of the divine nature all that is here taught, but the other human feeling of need for sympathy in deep emotion has something akin to itself even in his heart. He too has his cup of joy filled full by others drinking of it.

2. The differences of the two parables may be briefly dealt with. First comes the difference in the representations of the process of being lost. A sheep strays thoughtlessly from the flock, tempted by succulent pasture or careless where it is going; a coin rolls away by its own weight into a dark corner. So Jesus mercifully traces some sin, even of a gross sort, to heedlessness or stupidity, while some is little more than mechanical yielding to the force of circumstances. No doubt, there is a voluntary element in it, or it would not be sin, but no doubt also, there are many of the vicious and criminal classes who knew as little where they were going as does a straying sheep, and were as helpless in their sin as the coin that rolled away into a corner.

We note, too, the difference of sex in the two owners, which is probably due to the wish to bring the lesson home to both men and women in the audience, rather than to any far-fetched symbolism about a man's sense of ownership contrasted with the woman's tenderness; for it is ownership only which is in question in both parables. Another difference may, however, be suggested, which is in the very nature of the case. The sheep is miserable because lost, and pity blends with desire to recover his property in the shepherd's heart, while the latter is, of course, the sole motive in the case of the woman. In harmony with this, the expression in the second parable, "which I had lost," puts more emphasis on the personal ownership than that in the first, "which was lost." But perhaps the most striking difference is in the numbers, — a hundred and ten. One in ten is a much graver proportion of loss than one in a hundred. But the eagerness of the owner to reclaim the lost property has no relation to the amount still possessed. Every soul has its individual value in God's eyes, however many other souls are safe in the fold. Just because one is lost, he seeks for it, apart from any calculation of its proportionate worth. The principle may be applied to alleviate a difficulty often felt as to the incarnation and sacrifice of the eternal Word for the sake of so insignificant a corner of the universe as earth. What is this poor planet and the race that lives on it compared with the overwhelming magnitude of the systems that blaze as suns or shimmer as galaxies in the heavens?

Is it conceivable that the Son of God came to save the little creatures on such a speck? Yes, for they were lost, and therefore the Shepherd went to seek them. The flock may be counted by thousands but the one stray sheep appeals to the owner more than they all. They lose nothing by the effort lavished in their recovery. "He helped not angels, but he helped the seed of Abraham, wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." — Sunday School Times.

Helping One's Self.

An eminent author has published a book on "Self-Help." The theme is interesting and the treatment fascinating. The most that men do is intended to help themselves. Some live for this alone. But the course by which men seek to benefit themselves often proves vain. Instead of furthering their own ends and promoting their own comfort and happiness they are working against their own interest. This is true not only of vice and crime, but also of a large part of the more serious work of life.

The best way to help one's self is to help others. This is not the view worldly men take. They imagine that the more they do for others the less they have left for themselves. They get all they can, give as little as possible, and keep all they can. They do not give to help the poor, to build great institutions for educational and charitable uses, because they believe that giving will diminish their store and weaken themselves. When they give at all they try to do so in such a way that all men will know it in order to make it work for their own good after all. They give for themselves, and not for others.

How difficult it is to keep self from having too prominent a part! Is it easy for the preacher to keep self out of his sermon? for the worshipper to keep self out of the prayer? Nature clamors for self. While the spirit seeks after God and the good of others, the flesh still pushes self to the front.

If we could only understand, and have courage to trust, the philosophy of the Gospel, we should have little trouble about self. The science of Christianity reverses nearly all the maxims of the world and all the wisdom of the sages. He that will save his life must lose it, and he that will lose his life for the sake of righteousness shall save it. He that will be the greatest must condescend to be servant of all. He that will be richest must give all he has. He shall have a hundredfold in this world, and in the world to come everlasting life.

No man shall ever find happiness while seeking it for himself. The self-centered man cannot be happy. He may find gold, he may acquire knowledge, he may achieve fame, he may have pleasure in the world, but all these cannot pour one ray of genuine bliss into a self-centered soul. Let one who is unhappy do what he can to relieve the sorrows of others, and his own sorrow will be turned into joy. Let the burdened soul do what he can to bear the burdens of others, and his own burdens shall become light as air. Let him whose life is bitter begin to do what he can to sweeten the lives of others, and his own life will become sweeter still. Let him whose life is narrow do what he can to enlarge the lives of others, and his own life will become broad and deep and rich. "Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over."

When life's utmost verge shall be reached and we shall look back on the journey, the only part that will afford us any comfort and satisfaction will be that which we have devoted to helping others. Then shall we see and know that at all we have done for self alone is nothing but wood, hay, and stubble, which, like a parchment scroll, shall shrivel up and turn to dead ashes in the flames of the judgment of God, while all that we have done for others with a sincere heart is gold, silver, and precious stones, built into the kingdom of God to endure forever.

The Minister's Duty.

How it is possible for a man who professes himself called of God to preach the gospel and to become pastor of a flock in the name of Christ—how it is possible for such a one to content himself, or rest on his pillow, while allowing his people to consume everything upon him and themselves, is more than this writer can understand. We can understand that the ordinary church member may fail to appreciate his obligation to contribute to the support of mission causes, provided his pastor and his older brethren never call his attention to such duty. He may have come into the kingdom without ever having had his attention called to the great subject of worldwide evangelization. He may have been permitted to think that all required of a Christian is to acknowledge Christ and attend the services of the individual church; and so he may need much instruction before he gets to feel that he owes to Christ not simply his personal, prayer meeting and Sunday service, but a reasonable share of all his earnings. But for the minister of the gospel who has risen to the high dignity of a pastor to have such low

and narrow views of his relation to the cause of Christ, his Master, at home and abroad, is not only a disgrace to him, but is an impeachment of the Master from whom he professes to have received his call. One of the first evidences of a call to the ministry is a broad sympathy with the Lord Jesus in his work of winning the world to himself; not simply the winning of a few souls in the immediate neighborhood of the person called, but the promotion of the kingdom by the support of men and women who have gone or may go to the ends of the earth on the same mission, winning men and women to Christ and eternal life. The man who has not such sympathy with his Lord and the cause in which he is engaged lacks an essential evidence of his right to enter or to remain in the gospel ministry. Jesus could say, referring to his Father, "I do always those things which please him." He who is called of God to the gospel ministry (and no other ought to be in it) can not fail to feel that the things which please his Master are those which pertain to the extension of his kingdom; and the proof that a pastor is sensitive as to his duty to his Master must be seen in the earnestness with which he teaches his people their duty to contribute generously and systematically for the promotion of missions to the great world lying in the wicked one. — Journal and Messenger.

Applause.

And applause! Flee from the desire for it as from pestilence. It will weaken you infinitely. And to a strong man achievement is the only applause of value—the making of his point.

Many years ago I heard this story of Bismarck. If it is not true it ought to be. And if it is not true specifically it is true abstractly. He had just returned from one of his great diplomatic victories at the beginning of his career; great crowds had assembled in the plaza beneath his window in Berlin, cheering and madly calling for a speech. Bismarck heard it all, but smoked and drank his beer, and gave no sign. His secretary rushed in with excitement and said, "You must go out and acknowledge the applause of the people, and make a speech."

"And why?" said Bismarck. "Why do they want me to speak; why are they applauding me?" "Because of your great success in your negotiation," said the secretary. "Humph," said Bismarck; "suppose I had failed?" and turned back to his smoking and his beer. — Senator Beveridge.

Unless you put out your water-jars when it rains, you will catch no water; if you do not watch for God's coming to help you, God's watching to be gracious will be of no good at all to you. — Alexander MacLaren.

The greatest men are not those who "despise the day of small things," but those who improve them the most carefully. — Samuel Smiles.

In God's measurement of men, great souls are often found in obscure places, while pigmies pose on pedestals which stand in conspicuous places.

The talents, ours to-day, may be demanded by the Owner to-morrow. . . . Fidelity, not success, regulates the final reward. — Macduff.

Between the great things that we cannot do and the small things that we will not do, the danger is that we shall do nothing. — Monod.

Efforts are always successes. It is a greater thing to try without succeeding than to succeed without trying.

Troubles melt away before prayer, as snow before the sun. — Jean B. Vianney.

COUGHING ALL NIGHT.

It's this night coughing that breaks us down, keeping us awake most of the time, and annoying everybody in the house. Lots of people don't begin to cough until they go to bed. It gets to be so that retiring for the night is an empty form, for they cannot rest.

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Thorns, Yes—But Roses

D. L. Moody advertised for beautiful thoughts, and, among others, received this reply; "Men grumble because God puts thorns on roses. Would it not be better to thank God that he had roses on thorns?" This is a sweet inspiring sentiment, but who has not, in one of his gloomy moods, counted the thorns and utterly forgotten the roses?

The pathway of life is strewn with roses, and if it was not for the pricking of the thorns, we would not know that they were there. Paul had a thorn in the flesh lest he might be exalted above measure, yet who will say that the roses were not far in excess of the thorns? It was the memory of the roses that cast such a glory around his life, and enabled him to give to the world such inspiring and precious gems which have garnished the literature of the ages. John on the Isle of Patmos, forgot the thorns, in the abundance of the roses.

Who has not stood over the grave of a loved one, and felt the thorns very keenly? But the thought of a well-spent life, and the glorious hope of immortality, removed the rankling from the breast. My babe came, and smiled, then drooped and died; in that hour I forgot to count the roses, but many times since I have mused, and wondered why I did not see that those sweet smiles were the roses, which were to be mine forever. I would not call him back; he fulfilled his mission. Nor would I part with my roses for all the world; the rankling thorns I see and feel no more, for they are covered with a wreath of roses. The grave, like the Master's tomb, is surrounded with a garden, and out of it comes the very essence of perfume.

I sat down one day and tried to count my mercies, and I was lost—the mercies were so great, the ills so few. The roses were as plentiful as the stars. The thorns were in number only enough to remind me that I was mortal, a dweller on earth, and not in heaven. I gratefully acknowledge that my Father in heaven has strewn my pathway with roses, and made it pleasant and full of peace.

The roses and the thorns grow together. Much depends on the choice we make in life whether of the twain we gather. Blessed is he who plucks the roses, leaving the piercing thorn, but keeping and prizing the gathered roses, as "roses without a single thorn." — Chris. Starbuck.

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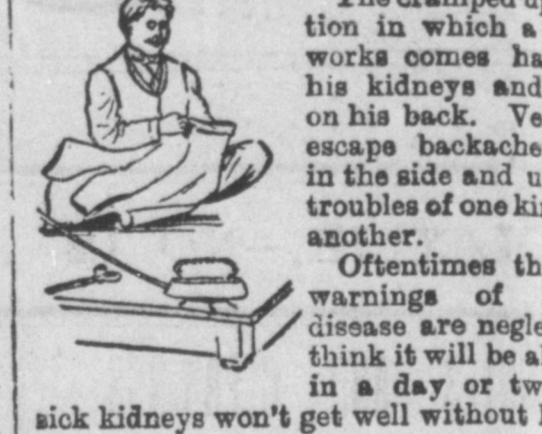
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