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The Elder Brother

By REV. LEW W. GOSNELL

Assistant Dean, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.

TEXT.—And he was angry and would not go in: therefore came his father out and entreated him.—Luke 15:28.



D. L. Moody frequently preached on "The Elder Brother." He said he did so because there are so many of him!

In the first instance the elder brother represented the Pharisees. The opening verses of Luke 15 read thus: "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." It was to rebuke this murmuring, by setting forth, in contrast, the seeking love of God, which goes forth to publicans and sinners, that Jesus spake the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost man, or the prodigal son. In fact, he draws a portrait of the murmuring Pharisees in the story of the elder brother. As Mr. Moody said, there are still many of him, for he finds successors in all formal religionists, who have no sympathy with God's joy over the recovery of the lost.

First of all, such men find no joy in the service they themselves offer God. When the prodigal came home, the father called on those about him to make merry. The parable goes on to say: "Now his 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" (vv. 25, 26). Such merriment was foreign to his spirit. And so it is always with formal religionists, for the joy of the Lord is not theirs. John Wesley was such an one even after being ordained to preach. When on his way to America as a missionary to the Indians, his ship ran into a dreadful storm. He was disturbed at the outlook, and was amazed to hear a company of simple-hearted Moravian Christians singing calmly and joyously in the midst of the storm. Even their children joined in the songs. Wesley was forced to contrast their conduct with his own feelings. The incident was an important factor in leading him out of a life of religious bondage into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

Notice, too, the restraint between this son and his father. When he would inquire as to the sounds of merriment in the house, he did not ask his father, but went to a servant. A life of true prayer is impossible to the formal religionist. He says prayers, but this is not the same as praying. The prayers of the Pharisees were full of vain repetitions, for like the heathen they thought they would be heard for their much speaking. To refer to John Wesley again, he never prayed without a prayer book until after he had come into the experience of a true child of God. How different is such restraint from "the boldness and access with confidence" to which God invites us.

How beautiful to read: "Therefore came his father out, and entreated him" (v. 28). It has been well remarked that this verse shows there is a gospel for the Pharisees! God loves the formal religionist quite as much as the prodigal. And if he only knew it, the formal religionist needs the compassion and grace of God quite as much as does the prodigal.

For, see the spirit exhibited in the son's complaint, that the father had never given him a kid that he might make merry with his "friends." Evidently his springs of joy were not in his father, but in his friends. And, verily, the successors of the elder brother would not be happy even in heaven. They would not find their joy there with the Father and would not respond when the Great Shepherd said: "Rejoice with me; for I have found the sheep which was lost."

But did not the father say, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine?" Yes, but he refers only to earthly things; the "living" he had divided. True, it is better not to squander our "substance," of body and mind and possessions, in riotous living, as did the prodigal. But it is true, also, that while a correct life is better than an irregular one, it will not of itself secure heaven.

The best robe was graciously laid on the repentant prodigal's shoulders The elder brother never wore it, and never will, until he recognizes the filthiness of his rags!

*Sum Total of a Life.

The sum total of a life lived in union with God is realized when the highest aspiration of the soul takes form in corporate and objective worship, and prayer becomes but the voice of one who has placed at the feet of the Lord Jesus a soul consecrated to the service of the dear Master, and the greater glory of His holy Name.—Rev. Henry Lowndes Drew.

Firm Persuasion.

A person under the firm persuasion that he can command resources virtually has them.—Livy.

New Glove-Cleaning Device.

A Massachusetts inventor has devised a glove-cleaning machine which is somewhat like an ice cream freezer. The soiled gloves are dropped into gasoline or other cleaning fluid and whirled around by a perforated blade through which the liquid is forced. After the handle has been turned about three minutes the gloves may be taken out spotless.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

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LESSON FOR FEBRUARY 6

THE MARRIAGE FEAST. (May Be Used With Missionary Applications).

LESSON TEXT—Matt. 22:1-14.

GOLDEN TEXT—Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in.—Luke 14:23.

REFERENCE MATERIAL—Isa. 55:1-11; Matt. 11:28-30; Luke 14:15-24; Rev. 22:17.

PRIMARY TOPIC—The Story of a Wedding Party.

JUNIOR TOPIC—An Invitation to a Wedding.

INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Accepting and Extending the Great Invitation.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—The Great Invitation.

In the previous parable the responsibilities of the subjects of the kingdom were before us for consideration in the light of the obligation to render to the householder the fruits of his vineyard. In this one the ethic is changed, and the privileges and blessings of the kingdom are placed on exhibition. This parable lifts the conception of the kingdom and places it on a high plane. It is much more than paying rent to a king; it is feasting at the King's table on fat things which He has prepared with great expense to Himself.

I. The King's Feast Despised (vv. 1-7).

The previous parable exhibits the attitude of the Jewish people toward the king up to the crucifixion of Christ. This one carries us beyond the cross, even through the present age of the Gentiles. The marriage feast which the king made for his son and to which he invited guests represents the gracious offer of God to give joy and blessing to certain of His creatures. This feast has been made in honor of his Son and is an exceeding rich one. His oxen and fatlings are ready. His repeated invitations show God's earnestness in seeking to bless men. God does more than simply invite men once; He presses His invitation again and again most earnestly. How many times from our childhood has He not pressed His invitation upon us! The attitude of those invited, toward the invitation and toward the king is passing strange and exceeding sinful. To treat the king's invitation with such contempt after he had made such costly preparation deserves the severest punishment. They not only neglected it but made light of it and hurried on to their worldly business, showing that they regarded it as of more importance than the salvation of their poor lost souls. Some went forth and even did violence to the messengers of the king, killing them.

While this is a picture of the attitude of the Jews from Christ's crucifixion to the destruction of Jerusalem, it has its counterpart in the day in which we live. Some today are indifferent to God's invitation; some are making light of God's way of salvation, and others are hostile to the messengers of Christ. Their attitude and behavior incited the anger of the king and he executed vengeance upon them, burning up their city. This was historically fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A. D., and is typical of what He will do to those that neglect or reject His invitation at the close of this dispensation.

II. The King's Invitation Accepted (vv. 8-10).

When those who were first invited refused, the king sent his servants to others; for his table must be provided the guests. He has prepared this feast at an infinite cost, and most urgently invites to the acceptance of it. Though He urgently invites, He will not compel any one to accept. Those that were shut out were shut out because they refused to accept, not because the king was unwilling. When this was done he sent his servants among the Gentiles, which is shown in His going into the highways and hedges.

III. The King Inspecting the Guests (vv. 11-14).

As he made this inspection the king found one among the guests who had not on a wedding garment—had not conformed to the regulations of the feast. The custom in the East was for the king to furnish the guests with a suitable garment. There could thus be no excuse for not having one on. Therefore, this act of the man showed that he only accepted the invitation for selfish ends, not desiring to conform to the regulations of the king. The wedding garment which the King provided in this case is the righteousness of Christ, which alone will entitle one to the place at the King's marriage feast. This righteousness is obtained by faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

Tuning Them.

Men think God is destroying them because he is tuning them. The violinist screws up the key till the tense cord sounds the concert pitch; but it is not to break it, but to use it tunefully, that he stretches the string upon the musical rack.—Beecher.

Difficulties.

Difficulties are God's errands; and when we are sent upon them, we should esteem it a proof of God's confidence—as a compliment from God.—Beecher.

"'A fellowship dinner? What's that?' said Myrtle.

"'Why,' said Mabel, 'you pay for mine, and I pay for yours.'"

Not Apprehensive.

"Aren't you afraid America will become isolated?"

"Not if us farmers keep raisin' things the world needs," answered Farmer Corntossel. "The feller that rings the dinner bell never runs much risk of bein' lonesome."

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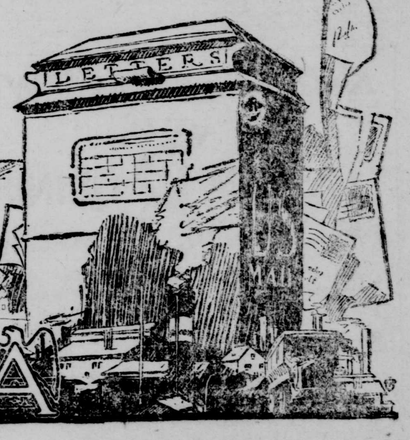
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