

THE PRODIGAL'S GREATEST JOURNEY - Returning to the Father

Lk. 15:17 ... when he came to himself ...

It's a touching description the Lord Jesus used to describe this very serious moment in the young man's life, **Lk. 15:17** when he came to himself. Previously, he had sought and been given independence from his father, **19** Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *lowing* to me. ... We don't detect an overwhelming amount of good manners for, - or gratitude towards, - his father. It is obvious he wanted to 'break free' to live his own life as he pleased for he believed his home circumstances hampered him from enjoying the attractions of life.

I don't suppose he intended wasting his inheritance the way he did, for I imagine he was a young fellow who knew all there was to know about everything! ... He was intent on choosing *what* he wanted to do, *when* to do it, with *whom*, and *where*. ... He was eager to be his own master. ... We must not judge him too harshly for it's something most of us have aspired after at one time or another. ... He is a *man* now. He's got money in his pocket to do as *he* pleases!

This is a great parable for preaching the Gospel, but it is actually more appropriate to the believer who has known the blessings of the Father but has squandered them. Let's consider this parable from the perspective of v.17, when he came to himself ... 'when he came to his senses'.

If this young man had lived today, his eyes would be 'popping out of his head' with what he would see as the fantastic opportunities around him! He would travel the world and be answerable to no one. ... It is so attractive, so alluring, so enticing ... He had all that money, and he would not have listened to any advice you or I would have offered.

Before we go into the 'far country' with him, let's have a look at his home life, and how he was brought up. ... This young man had a father who

loved him. He lived in his father's house, ate at his father's table, he had no worries, and he spent time in his father's company because he was his father's son. No one could deny who this young man's father was, and the young man was greatly privileged. Even when he took his journey into a far country, and left his father, he never stopped being his father's son. When he was 'throwing around' him his substance with riotous living (v.13), he was spending the inheritance his father had generously given him. He didn't steal it ... He didn't get it by dubious means for it was a gift from his father.

But there came a day in the 'far country' when there was 'no more money in the pot' ... and the young man was far from home, and he had 'run out' of friends, he had nowhere to stay, and he had no family in the 'far country'. He went from having it all to having nothing and he ended up homeless, friendless, and penniless ... *but not fatherless!* ... When the young man eventually arrived at this realization, that was when he was at the point when he came to himself.

IT WAS A LONG JOURNEY Picture this young man away far from his father. Had his father stood at the door of the home every night and called his name, the young man wouldn't have heard the tone in his voice or have seen the tears in his eyes, longing for his son to return.

The young man was somewhere his father would never be found. He was a world away from the home where he was nurtured and brought up in honourable and upright living. He wasn't used to the environment he was in, in the far country. ... Even if the mighty famine had not come (v.14), his new 'friends' would have eventually sucked him dry and deserted him. And the sad state he found himself in was he began to be in want (v.14). ... There, in those early stages- of *beginning* to be in want, common sense ought to have dictated to him it was time to get out quickly before he lost everything! The alarm bells should have been ringing loudly. ... But

stubbornness and pride are not good companions of common sense. Rather than going home, he convinced himself he would ‘stick it out’ until better times returned in the far country. ... Sin will take you places you never meant to go. It will take you where you never thought you would go, and it will keep you longer than you intended to stay, and it will cost you more than you expected to pay.

Ah, but I’m too old to make silly mistakes like that ... Do older people never act foolishly and ‘head off’ into a ‘far country’ with all types of silly thoughts rumbling around in their heads? ... I wish the answer was ‘no’, but they do ...

The prodigal son must not have been reading the social conditions very well because even in the famine *some* men were managing to do alright, - the pig farmer still had his pigs, and he still owned his fields. The people who he thought were his best friends were nothing of the sort! ... The pig farmer was among his own whereas the prodigal son was ‘out of his depth’ in a ‘far country’, - he was like the lost sheep “out on the hills away, far off in the cold and dark, ... away on the mountains wild and bare, away from the tender Shepherd’s care”. ... He was ‘out of his depth’, in a ‘foreign country’.

It is a plain fact the believer is out of place in this world. The world is not ‘safe’ for Christians, and it never has been. Many believers ‘dip their toes’ in its pursuits thinking they can have ‘a foot in the world’ and keep going on with the Lord. ... But the Bible warns us it does not work like that, and this young man found it out the hard way. However, he *was* his father’s son and his father had never stopped loving him. Yes, he was foolish and that is why he was in the state he was in, - impoverished and in want, - but he had a place to which he could return, and it took him a while before he realised it and admitted he began to be in want. ... He had yet some ways to go even further down though!

In the grace of God, he *did* go down even further. This would have been a tremendously sad story if he had gone off with his former friends and been lost completely and never returned to his home place ... but it was when he went even further down, he came to himself. ... Even at such a low level, God pursues those who are His, no matter how far they have wandered!

This young man, - when he first started out, - he hadn't a care in the world! It felt like the yoke with which he had been brought up was cast aside and 'life was for living' and he became involved in activities which would have shamed his father. But he didn't give his father any thought for all his dreams and fantasies he once had in his father's house, he was now able to put them into practice. ... Did he enjoy them? ... Of course, he did. Perhaps, - probably, - at the beginning, he might have had an inkling of guilt but at the same time, it did not stop him from trying to enjoy his new-found freedom.

And yet, back home, his father kept on loving him, and he never stopped looking and waiting for his son to return. ... The prodigal son gave up a loving home, where he never wanted for anything. ... He had been brought up with the very best, and yet he had sunk so low he was tramping through the muck and gutters with the pigs ... **It was a long journey ...**

IT WAS A LAWLESS JOURNEY ... No rules to live by, and that was how he wanted it for he was free to do whatever he liked. He could be his own man ... *But he wasn't his own man*, for he was what his friends wanted him to be! He didn't know who he was any more. He was in a country where he wasn't used to the rules ... and it was 'running rings round him'!

The ‘friends’ his lifestyle attracted ‘lived life on the edge’. They were ‘ducking and diving’ in all kinds of spurious transactions, and he followed them, imitating their behaviour. ... As a believer, you cannot expect anything from the world when you dabble in its pleasures. We see in our own society what happens when you call evil good, and accept the profane as normal ... It is a disaster, but this young man was so filled with his foolish dreams, he could not see what was staring him in the eyes! ... Where there is an absence of God’s grace there is lawlessness, and the child of God who has been saved has no warrant being in such a place. It’s **a long journey** from home, and it’s **a lawless journey**.

IT WAS A LONELY JOURNEY His ‘friends’ had all gone. Most of them, their ‘friendship’ would only have lasted a night or two. Leeches would best describe them! They would have no commitment. Frivolous and silly people! People who avoided reality and who never did a full day’s work in their lives! Wasters sponging off any fool silly enough to spend money on them! ... Plenty of laughs and carry on, but with no commitment or responsibilities. That was the kind of people this young man was ‘hanging out’ with. They weren’t his sort for they had perverted styles of behaviour and morals.

Besides, this young man would have intended moving on after a while for he wanted to ‘see the world’. ... But never did he think the vast amount of money his father gave me would ‘run out’, - he thought it was going to last forever. ... And then when it *was* gone, he was on his own, and it was **a lonely journey**. ... especially when he was forced to accept the indignity of cleaning out and feeding the pigs. He never ever would have dreamt, - not in his worst nightmare, - he would have ended up like this! ... There was nobody near him any longer, nobody to talk to. ... But it was when he was down so low, he began to look up ... and in fact, it was *good* he was brought to this place, *alone* with the swine! ... It was **a long journey, a lawless journey, and a lonely journey**.

Where next did his journey take him? ... It brought him to realise he still loved his father, and he was his father's son. That relationship had never been broken, not even in a 'foreign country' for it *can* never be broken, no matter what he did or where he was. ... His father still loved him ... He looked back on the days he spent before he departed, and he knew he had more at home than all the so-called riches his so-called friends were flaunting in the foreign country. Yes, he had wasted his father's legacy ... but he was still his father's son. Nothing could take that relationship from him.

... And when he was down so low, he decided, "I'm going to go back home to my father, and I'll work out *exactly* what I'm going to say to him, so he'll know I'm serious and I'm sorry for the fool I have made out of myself". ... He began another journey, **a lowly journey**, for the once proud son humbled himself as he determined to return to his loving father.

He had his speech meticulously planned, **18** 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 [*worthless, undeserving*] to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. ... And he meant every word. ... He got up and cleaned off the muck and dirt as best he could, and he started on the journey back home wearing those filthy clothes ... He was getting closer and closer with every step ... his mind was full of what he was going to say ... he was coming home penniless and destitute, - it wasn't easy, but he knew if he was to be reconciled to his father, it was **a lowly journey** he *had* to make ... And while he was still a long way down the lane, - making his way back along the old paths he had trod many times before during better circumstances, - he could see a figure he recognised standing at the front door. He knew it was his father. Every day since he had left, his father had been watching and waiting. ... And then he saw

his father come running down the lane, and threw his arms around him, and hugged him, and kissed him. His father had not stopped loving him all the time the son had been away ... even when the son never gave his father a thought.

Look at him coming along that lane, ²⁰ And he arose, and came to his father ... and see also his father ... his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. ... At last, the young man had returned to his father, and without any hesitation his father led him on up that lane, up the steps and into the home again, he took off his dirty clothes and put on fresh and clean garments, and he sat him on the seat at the table which had belonged to him before he left. ... The father took his place at the head of the table, and it was back to how things had been before ... except that now, this son had a greater appreciation of whose he was and all the privileges with which he was blessed.

What have you been thinking as we have been making our way through this part of the parable? ... In life, we mightn't have gone as far down the road as this young man and yet we can see how some of his story applies to our experiences ... on a **long, lonely, and lawless** journey, convincing ourselves we were enjoying life while having wandered away from the Lord Jesus, in a backslidden state. But He never stopped looking for and loving us and longing for us to return. He knew where we were all the time, and He knew the foolish ways we were pursuing in the 'far country' without Him.

God's grace not only saves us, but God's grace also keeps us. If it had not been for God's grace, we would have 'jumped into the feeding trough and filled our bellies with the husks the swine did eat' because we would not have known to do anything else! We would have gone from bad to worse until there was no way back. But God's grace alone saved us and keeps us ... and even if you cannot identify with how desperately low

this young man fell, we were all in a place of hopelessness before the Lord Jesus found us ... It is because of God's grace we are saved. It is because of God's grace we made **the lowly journey** back into our Father's house. It is not of ourselves, in case any of us would boast, but our salvation is all of God. It is His gift to us, undeserving as we are ... And He is keeping us for we are His prized possession, His workmanship, created in His Son (Eph. 2:8-10). He has given us eternal life, and He is holding on to us and no-one can ever pluck us out of His hand (Jn. 10:28,29) ... Not heartache, not illness, not uncertainties, not worries... *Nothing and no-one!!*

My hope is set on God alone,
though Satan spreads his snare,
I trust in Him, I trust in Him,
to keep me in His care.

Strong in the everlasting Name,
and in my Father's care,
I trust in Him, I trust in Him,
Who hears and answers prayer.