

THE HEART OF GOD

TOWARDS MAN

AND THE

REALITIES OF ETERNITY

ILLUMINATED BY THE

SEVEN GREAT PICTURES

JESUS HAS GIVEN US IN

The Parables of Luke's Gospel

The Inspiration of Scripture is so perfect that it is shown even in what it neglects to say.

Thus in the parables of Luke's Gospel.

While there are twelve Comparisons (for that is the translation of the Greek word *parabole*—one thing placed alongside of another, to show what it is like—) that are called Parables in the Gospel of Luke, there are also.

Seven Great Gospel Pictures

Which are so new, so different from the idea the mere brain of man has formed of God and of His doings, that we may well call them Revelations, or Illuminations as to the great things of the Gospel of Grace, and of the other, the Unseen world. And none of these Comparisons are called Parables. Why? Is it not because they are so near to the facts taught, and so different from mere human ideas, that they are given rather as Illuminations of the theme than mere comparisons?

The Bankrupt Debtor

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Luke 7. 41. The sinner has nothing with which to pay: he is insolvent, bankrupt. Only an act of absolute Grace can meet his ruined condition. Is it possible that God is so good, that this is really a picture of what He will do, if the sinner will but fall at His feet repentant, as that "woman in the city who was a sinner" fell at Jesus feet? What a new picture of God!

Her loving much, Christ shows us, was a proof that she had been forgiven much. vii. 47.

Every sinner has to give an account to God **some** day. While God is so ready to "frankly forgive" us our debt, why not go to Him now, and own up our ruined condition?

Our Lord accepted the tears of that repentant sinner as a refreshing shower to his feet. Forgiven much, she loved much, He said. Who would have imagined that our God cares at all for the love of a sinner? Only one way was there whereby a bankrupt sinner could be led to really love God, and that was to freely forgive him. As John says; Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.

A Certain Samaritan

Then we have (x. 30) another incident, not called a Parable, that is truly a most wonderful revelation of the reason of the

mission of Him whom the Pharisees called a Samaritan. John 8, 48.

The traveller had his back on God's city (Jerusalem), and his face toward the town God had cursed. He fell among thieves, who stripped him and left him half dead. Who so great a thief as the Devil? (John x. 10). This is man's condition—stripped; helpless; dying. He needs not merely an Example; he needs a Saviour.

Neither the priest nor the levite helped the poor man. The Devil has so maltreated the sinner, that no priestly ritual and ceremonial can cure him, nor can levitical service for God.

Then comes along the stranger, the alien the poor Jew had hated. He was going to market with a load of wine and olive oil. But "moved with compassion", he lavishes the oil and wine on his natural enemy:—the oil to soothe the wounds, and the wine to stimulate his strength, till he could get him to an inn. Then, having lodged him safely there, he makes himself responsible for all the expense of the future care of him.

What an illumination as to Christ saving the sinner! His blood poured out as an atonement, that will cover all the ravages of sin, and the Spirit poured out as the healer and revivifier! Then declaring that He will "save to the uttermost," that is to the end of the journey. Heb. 7. 25.

The Great Supper

"A certain man made a great supper, and bade many." Luke 14. 16.

Here again is an idea altogether new—a

revelation. No man had ever dreamed that God was **like this!** All the philosophers and teachers had held up the vision of God as an **Exacting God**, as a God demanding something **from man**. This idea that the way of Salvation is like a Banquet, liberlly provided, to which poor man is **invited**, as a guest, just to come and occupy a seat, and enjoy what God has provided, is really a declaration of the philanthropy of God. Even "the poor and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" being sought for and made welcome. 14. 21.

The Lost Coin

Seeking for the lost sheep is called a parable (15. 3): possibly because it is a common act of faithful shepherds. But the two that follow are not called parables: the truths that they embody being so entirely unknown to man.

We never grasped the real force of this story of the woman seeking for a lost piece of silver, until we connected it with the remark our Lord made when they brought him the silver coin with the emperor's image and inscription (20. 24). Both are silver coins, and of the same value.

Man is of value to God! What philosopher had thought of that? And man is **still** God's image (1. Cor. 11. 7) though debased and disfigured. Man has within, in his conscience, the inscription God has written there. For, as the Revised Version very properly translates it, Eccles. 3. 11 says, "He hath set **eternity** in their heart"

Yes, man is something that **belongs** to God, and He is sweeping and searching for

this lost piece of silver that bears His image and inscription. This helps us to grasp the truth, that not only is He willing to receive a penitent sinner, but that it gives Him joy to do so. It is for God a finding, a recovering.

The Lost Son

This, the greatest of all parables, is not called a parable at all. It is spoken of as a real history:—"A certain man had two sons —"

What an illumination as to the heart of God this story is! God still regards man as His child:—"a beam ethereal, sullied and absorpt! 'Tho' sullied and dishonored, still divine!"

"What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" is a question that comes as a necessary preliminary to the revelation of God's remedy for man's sin. This story answers that question most emphatically. As the father receives to his bosom the ragged and defiled wanderer, he says, "this my son was dead, and is now alive again."

No recognition could be given when he was in the far-off country with harlots, (nor did the boy desire it) but as soon as returned, with confession on his lips, he is re-instated, and more than re-instated. Such a banquet is made for him as he never might have had, but for his sad history.

Let the sceptics search where they will and they will never find, neither in the mythology of the Greeks and Romans, nor in the religion of Egypt and India, nor in any other, such a picture of the holiness and the love of God, blended together as we have

in this simple story, evidently told to reveal to us **why there is joy in heaven** over a returning sinner:—"This my son was dead; and is alive agin; he was lost, and is found."

The best robe heaven can furnish is to be given. And the ring, the emblem of eternal love. And then, thirdly, not firstly, the shoes for his feet—the energy to walk worthy of the new place of redemption.

And the fatted calf is to be killed and eaten.

Now the other notorious mention of a calf, is that about the awful apostacy of Israel when they made a calf to worship it.

Material things have been given for man's use, not for his worship. When the sinner has returned to his God; when he is clothed with the best robe, enjoying his restored favour, **then** it is revealed to him that "all things are your's" (1. Cor. 3. 21.) and that our Father will give us every thing needed for our comfort and our joy.

Stewardship

In chapter 16 we have a parable, not called a parable, about the steward of some rich man, who knowing that he was soon to lose his situation, shrewdly provided for his future—using his master's goods for that purpose.

The lesson our Lord draws from it is this:—"Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

We are but stewards, none of us really **own** anything, we came into the world naked, and every useful faculty we have is God-given.

We have all been found unfaithful and we have received notice to quit. Let us think about our future.

The Gospel pictures of the lost sheep and silver and son are addressed to the publicans and sinners who drew near to hear Him (15. 2). But this, about stewardship, is especially addressed to disciples. So it does not tell of a way of salvation, but of the responsibility of those who are saved to use the money or goods the Lord entrusts to them in alleviating misery and helping those in need, so that when we leave this world we shall find friends to welcome us in the everlasting habitations—friends that we have gained by the wise use of what our Master endowed us with.

The Reality of Hell and Heaven

The last of these seven great pictures is the one about the beggar and the rich man. **It is not called a parable.** It was too solemn and too momentous to be given a title that might be perverted.

No, it is a calm narration of fact. Just as real and as true to life as the picture of the returning son being welcomed by the father.

The beggar dies, and is carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom—carried, that is, to the companionship of Abraham, as representative of all the pilgrims and heavenly strangers (Heb. 11. 16).

The rich man dies and goes to a place of torment.

So the veil that hides the unseen world is lifted by our Lord Himself—life and immortality are brought to light (not into existence, they did exist) by the Gospel.

His words put the main facts beyond

doubt:—the believers go, go at once, to where others who have left this life are resting. The impenitent go, go at once, to a place of suffering, from which there is no escape.

To raise questions as to details, is but to quibble. Our Lord, who is Truth itself, surely could not be guilty of deceiving us by painting a picture before our imagination of things that do not really exist in fact.

He who came from heaven, He who knows all about these things, has given us this vivid narration, so that all may be awakened, so that no one may any longer be in uncertainty as to the question of the survival of the soul, and as to the reality of rewards and punishments.

See how these seven great pictures gradually unfold the great truths of the Gospel Revelation:—

1. Man is bankrupt, he has nothing to pay with.

2. The heavenly Stranger makes himself our loving Neighbour.

3. The way of salvation is like a simple invitation—Come and feed upon the bread of life.

4. Man is dear to God, a family treasure bearing His image.

5. He will be recognized as a son, if he will return. Forgiveness and welcome are assured him.

6. Having been saved, we must remember our stewardship.

7. The end of our lives will be either rest and happiness with the saints above, or torment and remorse in the hell below.

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