

The Turning Point.

BY C. H. SPURGRON.

"And he arose, and came to his father."—Luke 15: 20.

We shall begin by noticing that here is action—"He arose and came to his father." He had already been in a state of thoughtfulness; but now he was to go further, and come to his father. He had considered the past, and weighed it up, and seen the hollowness of the world's pleasures; he had seen his condition in reference to his father, and his prospects if he remained in the far-off country; he had thought upon what he ought to do, and what would be the probable result of such a course; but now he passed beyond the dreaminess of thought into matter-of-fact acting and doing. How long will it be, dear hearers, before you will do the same? We are glad to have you thoughtful; we hope that a great point is gained when you are led to consider your ways, to ponder your condition, and to look earnestly into the future, for thoughtlessness is the ruin of many a traveller to eternity, and by its means the unwary fall into the deep pit of carnal security and perish therein. But some of you have been among the "thoughtful" quite long enough; it is time you passed into a more practical stage. It is high time that you came to action; it would have been better if you had acted already; for in the matter of reconciliation to God, first thoughts are best. When a man's life hangs on a thread, and hell is just before him, his path is clear, and a second thought is superfluous. The first impulse to escape from danger and lay hold on Christ is that which you would be wise to follow. Some of you whom I now address have been thinking, and thinking, and thinking, till I fear that you will think yourselves into perdition. May you, by divine grace, be turned from thinking to believing, or else your thoughts will become the nuyding worm of your torment.

The prodigal had also passed beyond mere regret. He was deeply grieved that he had left his father's house, he lamented his lavish expenditure upon wantonness and reveling, he mourned that the son of such a father should be degraded into a swineherd in a foreign land; but he now proceeded from regret to repentance, and bestirred himself to escape from the condition over which he mourned. What is the use of regret if we continue in sin? By all means pull up the sluices of your grief if the floods will turn the wheel of action, but you may as well reserve your tears, if they mean no more than idle sentimentalism. What avails it for a man to say he repents of his conduct if he still perseveres in it? We are glad when sinners regret their sin and mourn the condition into which sin has brought them, but if they go no further, their regrets will only prepare them for eternal remorse. Had the prodigal become inactive through despondency, or stolid through sullen grief, he must have perished, far away from his father's home, as it is to be feared many will whose sorrow for sin leads them into a proud unbelief and wilful despair of God's love; but he was wise, for he shook off the drowsiness of his despondency, and, with resolute determination, "arose and came to his father." Oh, when will you sad ones be wise enough to do the same? When will your thinking and your sorrowing give place to practical obedience to the Gospel?

The prodigal also pressed beyond mere resolving. That is a sweet verse which says, "I will arise," but that is far better which says, "And he arose." Resolves are good, like blossoms, but actions are better, for they are the fruits. We are glad to hear from you the resolution, "I will turn to God," but holy angels in heaven do not rejoice over resolutions, they reserve their music for sinners who actually repent. Many of you, like the son in the parable, have said, "I go, sir," but you have not gone. You are as ready at forgetting as you are at resolving. Every earnest sermon, every death in your family, every pricking of conscience, every touch of sickness, sets you a resolving to amend, but your promissory notes are never honored, your repentance ends in words. Your goodness is as the dew, which at early dawn hangs each blade of grass with gems, but leaves the fields all parched and dry when the sun's burning heat is poured upon the pasture. You mock your friends, and trifle with your own souls. You have often in this house said, "Let me reach my chamber and I will fall upon my knees," but on the way home you have forgotten what manner of men you were, and sin has confirmed its tottering throne. Have you not dallied long enough? Have you not lied unto God sufficiently? Should you not now give over resolving and proceed to the solemn business of your souls like men of common sense? You are in a sinking vessel, and the life-boat is near, but your mere resolve to enter it will not prevent your going down with the sinking craft; as sure as you are a living man, you will drown unless you take the actual leap.

The text implies that the prodigal aroused himself, and put forth all his energies.

Men are not saved between sleeping and waking. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Grace does not stupefy us, but it arouses us. Surely, sirs, it is worth while making

an awful effort to escape from eternal wrath. It is worth while summoning up every faculty and power and emotion and passion of your being, and saying to yourself, "I cannot be lost; I will not be lost; I am resolved that I will find mercy through Jesus Christ." The worst of it is, O sinners, ye are so sluggish, so indifferent, so ready to let things happen as they may. Sin has bewitched and benumbed you. You sleep as on beds of down, and forget you are in danger of hell fire. You cry, "A little more rest, and a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the arms to sleep," and so you sleep on, though your damnation slumbereth not. Would to God you could be awakened. It is not in the power of my voice to arouse you; but may the Lord himself alarm you, for never were men more in danger. Let but your breath fall, or your blood pause, and you are lost forever. Frazier than a cobweb is that life on which your eternal destiny depends. If you were wise you would not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you had found your God and been forgiven. Oh, when will you come to real action? How long will it be ere you believe in Jesus? How long will you sport between the jaws of hell? How long dare you provoke the living God?

Alas! there are many anxious souls who do not go to others, but they look to themselves. They sit down and cry, "I want to repent; I want to feel my need; I want to be humble." O man, get up! What are you at? Leave yourself and go to your Father. "Oh, but I have so little hope; my faith is very weak, and I am full of fears." What matters your hopes or your fears while you are away from your Father? Your salvation does not lie within yourself, but in the Lord's good will to you. You will never be at peace till, leaving all your doubts and your hopes, you come to your God and rest in his bosom. "Oh, but I want to conquer my propensities to sin, I want to master my strong temptations." I know what it is you want. You want the best robe without your Father's giving it you, and shoes on your feet of your own procuring; you do not like going in a beggar's suit and receiving all from the Lord's loving hand; but this pride of yours must be given up, and you must get away to God, or perish forever. You must forget yourself, and only remember yourself so as to feel that you are bad throughout, and no more worthy to be called God's son. Give yourself up as a sinking vessel that is not worth pumping, but must be left to go down, and get you into the life-boat of free grace. Think of God your Father—of him, I say, and his dear Son, the one Mediator and Redeemer of the sons of men. There is your hope—to fly away from self and to reach your Father.

Sinner your business is with God. Hasten to him at once. You have nothing to do with yourself, or your own doings, or what others can do for you, the turning point of salvation is, "he arose and came to his father." There must be a real, living, earnest contact of your poor guilty soul with God, a recognition that there is a God, and that God can be spoken to, and an actual speech of your soul to him, through Jesus Christ, for it is only God in Christ Jesus that is accessible at all. Going thus to God, we tell him that we are all wrong, and want to be set right; we tell him we want to be reconciled to him, and are ashamed that we should have sinned against him; we then put our trust in his Son, and we are saved. O soul, go to God: it matters not though the prayer you come with may be a very broken prayer, or even if it has mistakes in it as the prodigal's prayer when he said, "Make me as one of thy hired servants;" the language of the prayer will not signify so long as you really approach to God. "Him that cometh to me," says Jesus, "I will in no wise cast out;" and Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for them that come to God through him.

Here, then, is the great Protestant doctrine. The Romish doctrine says you must go round by the back door, and half-a-dozen of the Lord's servants must knock for you, and even then you may never be heard; but the grand old Protestant doctrine is, come to God yourself; come with no other mediator than Jesus Christ; come just as you are, without merits and good works; trust in Jesus, and your sins will be forgiven you.

No, in that action there was an entire yielding up of himself. In the prodigal's case, his proud independence and self-will were gone. The great mischief of all was his distance from his father, and he now feels it to be so. His great thought is to remove that distance by humbly returning, for then he feels that all other ills will come to an end. He yields up his cherished freedom, his boasted independence, his liberty to think and do and say whatever he chose, and he longs to come under loving rule and wise guidance. Sinner, are you ready for this? If so, come and welcome; your father longs to press you to his bosom!

He gave up all idea of self-justification, for he said, "I have sinned." Before he would have said, "I have a right to do as I like with my own; who is to dictate how I shall spend my own money? If I do ~~lose~~ a few wild oats, every young man does the same. I have been very generous, if nothing else; nobody can call me greedy. I am no hypocrite. Look at your canting

Methodists, how they deceive people! There's nothing of that in me, I'll warrant you; I am an outspoken man of the world; and, after all, a good deal better in disposition than my elder brother, fine fellow though he pretends to be." But now the prodigal boasts no longer. Not a syllable of self-praise falls from his lips; he mournfully confesses, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee." Sinner, if you would be saved you also must come down from your high places, and acknowledge your iniquity. Oh, sinner, lay bare before God thy sores, thy putrefying sores of sin, the horrid ulcers of thy deep depravity, and cry, "O Lord, have mercy upon me!" This is the way of wisdom. Have done with pride and self-righteousness, and make thy appeal to the undeserved pity of the Lord, and thou wilt speed.

The penitent also yielded up all his supposed rights and claims upon his father, saying, "I am not worthy to be called thy son." He might have said, "I have sinned, but still I am thy child," and most of us would have thought it a very justifiable argument; but he does not say so, he is too humble for that, he owns, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." A sinner is really broken down when he acknowledges that if God would have no mercy on him, but cast him away forever, it would be no more than justice.

Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee just in death;
And, if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well.

That soul is not far from peace which has ceased arguing and submits to the sentence. Oh, sinner, I urge thee, if thou wouldst find speedy rest, go and throw thyself at the foot of the cross where God meets such as thou art, and say, "Lord, here I am; do what thou wilt with me. Never a word of excuse will I offer, nor one single plea by way of extenuation. I am a mass of guilt and misery, but pity me, oh, pity me! No rights or claims have I; I have forfeited the rights of creatureship by becoming a rebel against thee. I am lost and utterly undone before the bar of thy justice. From that justice I flee and hide myself in the wounds of thy Son. According to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions!"

Notice further, and fourthly, that in this act there was a measure of faith in his father—a measure, I say, meaning thereby not much faith, but some. A little faith saves the soul. There was faith in his father's power. He said, "In my father's house there is bread enough and to spare." Sinner, dost thou not believe that God is able to save thee; that through Jesus Christ he is able to supply thy soul's needs? Canst thou not get as far as this, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean?" The prodigal had also some faith in his father's readiness to pardon; for, if he had not so hoped, he would never have returned to his father at all; if he had been sure that his father would never smile upon him he would never have returned to him. Sinner, do believe that God is merciful, for so he is. Believe, through Jesus Christ, that he willeth not the death of the sinner, but had rather that he should turn to him and live; for as surely as God liveth, this is truth, and do not thou believe a lie concerning thy God. The Lord is not hard or harsh, but he rejoices to pardon great transgressions. The prodigal also believed in his father's readiness to bless him. He felt sure that his father would go as far as propriety would permit, for he said, "I am not worthy to be called thy son, but make me at least thy servant." In this also he admitted that his father was so good that even to be a servant would be a great matter. He was contented even to get the lowest place, so long as he might be under the shade of so good a protector.

Ah, poor sinner, dost thou not believe that God will have mercy on thee if he can do so consistently with his justice? If thou believest that, I have good news to tell thee. Jesus Christ, his Son, has offered such an atonement that God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth; he has mercy upon the vilest, and justifieth the ungodly, and accepteth the very chief of sinners through his dear Son. Oh, soul, have mercy in the atonement. The atonement made by the personal sacrifice of the Son of God must be infinitely precious; believe that there is efficacy enough in it for thee. It is thy safety to fly to that atonement and cling to the Cross of Christ; and thou shalt honor God by so doing, it is the only way in which thou canst honor him. Thou canst honor him by believing that he can save thee, even thee. The truest faith is which believes in the mercy of God in the teeth of conscious unworthiness. The penitent in the parable went to his father too unworthy to be called his son, and yet he said, "My father." Faith has a way of seeing the blackness of sin, and yet believing that God can make the soul as white as snow. It is not faith that says, "I am a little sinner, and therefore God can forgive me;" but that is faith which cries, "I am a great sinner, an accused and condemned sinner, and yet, for all that, God's infinite mercy can forgive me, and the blood of Christ can make me clean." Believe in the teeth of thy feelings, and in spite of thy conscience