

LIVING IT UP

Luke 15:13c

In the pearl of parables, which is recorded in Luke 15, we catch a glimpse of a lovely home in which there was practically everything that the hearts of its occupants could wish. The noble, wise, kind, loving and devoted father watched the progress of his two sons as they grew into manhood.

The day came when the younger son reached the age when he thought that he knew more and better than his father. He had grown tired of the restraints of home. He decided that he would be more free, and much hoping to be happier, in the big world beyond the hills. He became intoxicated with the lure of sights unseen and of experiences untried, which he had heard existed over the hills and far away. He wanted to get out on his own, live his own life, have his own way, and do as he pleased. He decided that he was going to leave home; He mustered enough courage to approach his father and request his share of the inheritance. Reluctantly, and against his better judgment, the father acceded to the expressed wish of his son.

As soon as possible, the young man got his share of the estate into portable form, ostensibly in the form of cash, and prepared for his departure from home in quest of self-realization, fully determined not to permit anybody to prevent him from going anywhere he desired and doing anything he pleased.

Before he took his departure, this young man was fully convinced that he was not living a full life, but that he was being cheated out of something. He felt a tremendous urge to live where he would never hear anybody say, "Don't do this," or "Don't do that." I can almost hear him saying, "Father, I want to be independent. I just can't go on listening to this 'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not.'" I can also hear the father say, "Do you really think that you do not have freedom? After all, you are my son, and you can come to me at any time that you wish, and you can tell me anything and everything that troubles you. Son, many a person would be delighted to have these privileges. After all, isn't that freedom?" Then, I can hear the son reply: "No, father, I don't care a hoot about all that. For me, freedom means to be able to do what I want to do, when I want to do it." And I can hear the father say: "To me, freedom means that you should become what you ought to be. You should not, for example, become a servant of your desires, or a slave to your ambitions, your intellectual boredom, or your longings for recognition. Don't you understand that it is love that is behind my bidding and forbidding?" Naturally, the son knew that his father was right, but he was not interested in the right. Right did not fit in with the way in which he wanted to live. Right was too narrow for him. To him the mysteries of life were beckoning and his passions were seething. Besides, he did not want to miss anything that life had to offer. He had reached the conclusion, which others had expressed, that, after all, it is a good thing for a young man to sow wild oats. He had heard that a man really grows up when he gets away from home. Of course, he will get into some messes, and you might as well expect that of any human being with any spirit of adventure, but the main thing is to learn how to wriggle out of them. Then, you'll really know what life is and you'll be a real man then. It is better to get into trouble, and then get out of it, than it is to stay at home like a good and innocent "mamma's boy." Along these lines this young man rationalized.

This passion for independence expresses itself in many ways. When a child reaches a certain age, or develops a particular attitude, and his or her parents want their offspring to continue in school, the youngster decides that he or she wants to be independent. So, thinking that he or she knows enough already, and will never need any more education, he or she quits school to earn some money. Untold multitudes thus limit themselves and their opportunities for the remainder of their lives, and absolutely wreck what would otherwise be some very promising careers through that folly, and all because they insist upon exercising their independence before they are ready for it. Some of you have already done that, and others of you expect to do so in the near future.

When we want freedom without restraint, as did the prodigal, we usually want to do less than our best. It is true that we can do as we please with our personalities, our powers, and our possessions. But it is not wise or best for us to do so. Through the exercise of our freedom, and through our waste of our personalities, our powers, and our possessions we actually prove how incompetent we really are. The right and the best thing for us to do is to discover and to do the will of God with reference to the use of our personalities, our powers, and our possessions.

God does not, and will not, compel our allegiance and our obedience. He will do everything that He can, which is consistent with His nature, to acquire and hold our allegiance and our obedience, but the door to unfaithfulness and disobedience is open to us, if we are determined to enter it. Obedience is right and tremendously important, but it is never compulsory. Our Lord will not use any forceful means to make us obey Him. He will entreat, but He will not compel. He will plead, but He will not coerce. An individual can rebel against God's expressed will and go his own sinful way, if he so desires, but it will always be to his own detriment. If we, as individuals, as families, as churches, or as nations, want less than the best, it will always be available to us. Nobody can keep us from it, if that is all that we want.

V. His Dissipation. Verse 11c.

This young man looked forward to the time when all restraints would be removed, and he could live it up in a grand manner. He broke all home ties and went out as though he never expected to return. Perhaps it was a beautiful spring morning when he took his departure. If so, the birds were singing sweetly, the air was fragrant with the perfume of spring flowers, his voice was full of gladness and good cheer, and with light and tripping steps he made his way out from the old home. Doubtless as he went over the last hill before going out of sight, he glanced back over his shoulder and saw the tall trees under which he had played as a boy. He was exceedingly proud because he was going out into the big world on his own. Now that he was his own boss, nobody could prevent him from going where and doing what he pleased. He intended to have a good time and really live it up. What a tragedy when one does not have anything higher than pleasure as his goal in life!

When you are in the springtime of life, numerous voices will call to you to make pleasure the chief aim and prime motive of your life. Persistently and insistently, they will say to you, "Get satisfaction out of life." They will never urge to put

meaning, service and sacrifice into your life, but they will insist that you make life a scheme and a trickery.

These voices will urge you to be deaf to Bulwer who said, "The life of pleasure makes even the strongest mind frivolous." They will urge you to ignore Shenstone who said, "What leads to unhappiness is making pleasure the chief aim." They will declare too that Parker was wrong when he said, "A life merely of pleasure, or chiefly of pleasure, is always a poor and worthless life. — always unsatisfactory in its course, always miserable in its end." They will say that Beecher blundered when he remarked, "Mere pleasure, sought outside of some usefulness, is fraught with poison." They will deny the truth that "Pleasure seekers are like those letting empty buckets down into empty wells and growing weary with drawing up nothing." They will say that Paul uttered a falsehood when he said, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." If your one purpose in life is to have a good time at any cost, paralysis of the heart and palsy of the soul are inevitable. Any who are chasing the short-lived butterflies of pleasure need to learn and to remember that

"Pleasures are as poppies spread;
You seize the flower, the bloom is shed.
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment seen, then gone forever.
Or like the borealis rays
That flit ere you can point the place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Vanishing amid the storm."

The tragedy of any life that strives chiefly for pleasure is that it moves among sublimities but never sees them, and plays marbles with diamonds but never suspects their value.

When the young man, who is mentioned in the parable, arrived in the distant city, he was received without question because he had the money to take care of all expenses. A band of buxom high-lifers and a gang of jovial spendthrifts gathered around him. Together they went all the gaits and took in everything, including places of pleasure, costly banquets, multiplicity of drinks, haunts of vice, and dens of immorality. He indulged in the great sins which have devastated so many lives down through the ages; the sins that have been the undoing of every great civilization of the past — gambling, drinking and immorality. These three sins overthrew the culture of Greece. They caused the downfall of the Roman Empire. They are cutting the foundation out from under Europe. They are eating out the very heart of America. What are these sins? Drinking, gambling and immorality. While I am saying these things, some of you are saying to yourself, "He is right about it, and I am going to change." I have never conducted a funeral service for any drunkard but that sometime during his life he had said, "One of these days I am going to quit drinking, or I am going to change," but he waited too long. Don't say, "Just a little while longer." Once, twice, thrice may be too late. It has been with many. It may be with you.

Yonder in the Himalayas was a huge lake of poisoned waters. The birds of various kinds had looked out across those poisoned waters, spread their wings, and then started to

fly across this lake of death. One after the other had tried it, but after a short distance each had plunged into the lake. The eagle, the king of all the birds, perched on the top-most peak, watched all the host of birds as they flew out and plunged down to their death in the poisoned waters. At last, proud, boastful eagle spread his wings and soared up, and up, and up, and up, until he was lost in the ethereal blue. Proud conqueror of the air, he started to soar across the lake. On and on he soared, but at last his wings began to droop, and his proud head began to fall. Finally he took an awful plunge and went down to a terrible death in the water below. He went higher, he went longer, and he went farther than any of the other birds, but he did not have the strength to cross the deadly fumes of the poisoned waters. So, my friends, it may be with you. Some may go until they are thirty, others may go until they are forty, and still others may go beyond that, but remember this, at last "for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

A boy came home late one night, as many youngsters think it is smart to do. Go on, but at last you would give the world if you had the old home to which you could go. When this boy got home, his father was sitting up and waiting for him. He said, "Son, you have broken your mother's heart; you have broken my heart." Proud, defiant and resentful, the boy folded his arms and refused to speak a word. The father said: "Every time you say an oath, and everytime you take a drink of liquor I am going to drive a nail in that hitching post yonder at the front gate." The boy turned with half-satanic smile, and hurried himself away. The next day a nail was driven in that post. The next day another nail went in there, two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, one hundred twenty-eight, two hundred fifty-six, five hundred twelve -- soon that post was covered with nails. The boy said: "Is that my record? Is that my record?" When told that it was, he turned and said: "I will change." He turned his back on his old life. The father came with the hammer and began pulling out the nails. And he pulled them out one at a time as the son obeyed until the last nail was pulled out. Then he said, "Oh, son, how proud is this day." He threw his arms around him, but the son did not rejoice. He turned pale and said, "Oh, father, the nails are gone, but the holes are there." So, I plead with you young people -- not you older people, the nails have been driven in your lives, the holes and the scars are there, but listen! Hear me, boys and girls! Don't drive the nails in the post! And the scars won't be there. If you don't want the scars, then don't drive the nails in the post.