

A Parable of the Father's Love

HOW do you get the attention of a room full of teenagers, especially when all you want to do is engage them with the Bible? I sat squashed in a corner with a close friend, wondering what was going to happen to quell the near riot going on. Through the legs of the milling bodies I had caught sight of something rather unusual – a large piece of tree trunk sitting in the middle of the floor. Right now someone was sitting on it.



There was a sudden shout and the crowd around the door began to back away from that area. As they did so, others ceased their jostling and fairly quickly found seats, until the floor was cleared. In the large space there stood another of my friends; he was beginning to swing a large wood cutter's axe. The axe reached the height of its swing and was brought down with a huge noise. Crash! The axe head was buried in the top of the now vacant tree trunk. There was absolute silence and my friend began his story.

“What have this tree trunk and the axe got to do with a parable in the Bible? The one about two sons, one of whom wanted his

inheritance early? Perhaps we should read it.” He took a rather well used Bible out of his pocket.

A Bible Story

“It's found in the Gospel of Luke chapter 15.” He read aloud the story Jesus told, about a young man who asked for his inheritance and went off to ‘live it up’ in a country far away from his father, the farm and his family. Soon the money was all spent and the young man began to be in need, all of his ‘good life friends’ were gone and there was a famine. He ended up feeding pigs, and eating worse than they did. His life was a disaster.

“I was better off at home,” he thought, “but will they take me back?” Hungry as he was he started the journey home.

What he didn’t know was that, day after day, his father had been watching for his son to return, looking down the road just to see if the young man was coming. Happily on this one day, as the father gazed along the road, there was the distant figure of his long-lost son trudging wearily along. The father ran down the road to greet his son, threw his arms around him and welcomed him back home. There was feasting and a generally good feeling around the family home – the lost son had returned. Life could begin again. The father was happy.

A Worrying Experience

“We still have the question, what has this to do with a hunk of wood and a great axe?” My friend continued his story, which he told as follows.

I had been doing some preaching work in a northern Scottish town, not far from which was a forester’s camp. The camp was a rough place where all sorts of men gathered looking for casual work, and possibly a hiding place. They were running away from the law, family breakdown, debt and all manner of personal disaster. It wasn’t the kind of place where we would be doing any preaching work!

As I drove my car to my peaceful accommodation, it was very late. I drove down a hill into the deserted town and as a set of traffic lights changed to red, I pulled



up. Before I knew what was happening, the doors of the car were suddenly flung open and three burly guys got into the back of the car and slammed the rear doors behind them.

“Tek us home, will ye!” came a slurred, drunken request. There was nothing for it. I would have to drive them out to the camp. I was sure that was where they lived. “And what are you doing in these parts?” one asked.

“I am doing some Bible missionary work,” I replied.

“You can’t be serious!” Raucous laughter flowed from the back seats. As the laughter subsided, one said, “Read us something from the Bible.”

“I’ll have to pull over, if you want me to read.” I said. ‘But what should it be?’ I was desperately thinking to myself, really uncomfortable with the whole situation and not wanting to let anyone ridicule the Bible.

In a convenient layby I stopped the car and reached for my old Bible – this one I just

read from. What should I read? As I pulled my Bible from the shelf, I dropped it on the floor and it flopped open. As I picked it up, I saw that it had opened at one of my favourite passages – Luke 15, the parable about the father’s love. I decided to read it, as I had no better idea, and it certainly is a story that most can understand. The men of course were still sniggering a bit, half whispering amongst themselves,

“He doesn’t know what to read.” “Oh! Give the man a chance.”

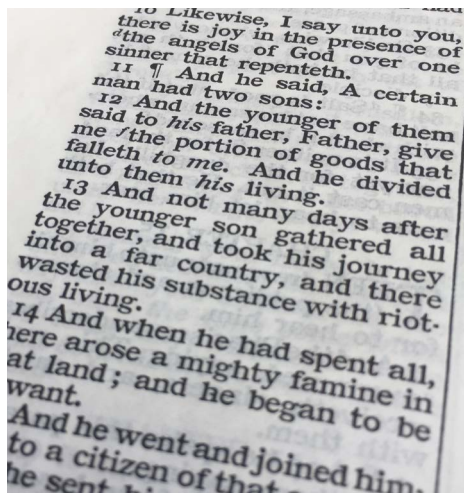
“A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me...”

Impact!

It went very quiet as I read and the story unfolded. At the end of the story, a kind of hush settled into the car. For what seemed like ages, no one spoke, until one man nudged my shoulder and said again, “Tek us hame.”

The rest of the journey was completed in silence, and nothing was said as they tumbled out of the car in a forest clearing outside their cabins. I drove away wondering whatever had happened to three roaring drunks because of reading that simple parable.

Later in the week I happened to spot two of the men in the town, looking reasonably sober. I thought to myself, ‘I won’t ignore you, I want to know if you have any memory of the other night.’ Sure enough they knew me all right and passed a few pleasantries.



Eventually I asked, “And where is your friend?”

“Oh,” they said almost in unison, “He’s gone back home.”

For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found (Luke 15:24).

David Nightingale

