

The Prodigal's Suffering from Sin

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 15, where we are going to continue looking at the parable of the prodigal son, which is one of three parables that Jesus gave to confront and correct some of the carnal thinking of the scribes and Pharisees who were grumbling because tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus.

After the sixth day of Creation, everything, the Bible says, was “very good” [see Genesis 1:31]. God had created man. Adam and Eve were perfect: they were without sin, were in a perfect environment, had perfect food, the animals were not beastly, and [Adam and Eve] had God as their closest friend. They only had one rule [to follow]: Don’t eat of the fruit of this tree [see Genesis 2:16–17]. Life was good. But, as we know, Eve was tempted by Satan, who was there in the form of a serpent. Being present there, he deceived her into first doubting God, [then] lusting after the fruit, and then taking the fruit and eating it. Adam, of course, who was with her, knowingly rebelled against the Lord and followed his wife into sin. He, too, ate that forbidden fruit [see Genesis 3:1–6].

Oftentimes you hear people say things like, “If there is a good God, then why doesn’t He deal with all the evil in the world?” When they say that, I think they don’t realize that they’re really saying, “Why doesn’t He deal with me?” *We* are the evil in the world. God made everything perfect. God doesn’t cause anybody to sin, doesn’t tempt anybody to sin. No, the

problem is with sinful men and demons. God *is* doing something right now about the evil in the world, and what He's doing is showing mercy and grace toward unworthy sinners, giving them time to repent, believe, and be saved from the wrath to come. That's what God is doing right now. There will be a time when He will enter into time-space history, and He will eradicate all evil, but it is good that He is not doing that now because it is giving sinners time to repent.

God is blamed for what men and demons are doing. When you think about it, Satan rebelled in heaven, then he deceived Eve, then Adam sinned, and God had to deal out the curses. Think about that time, way back in Genesis, when [Adam and Eve] first sinned. Little did they know all the grief and misery that they would bring upon all of history since then because they wanted to eat the fruit of that one tree. Think about the consequences [that] were packed into that sin. They're just monumental. The wars, famine, disease, cancer—everything that we suffer now that is not good is all due to the consequences of sin. Just [as] God, when He created the universe, created certain scientific laws to govern the physics of the physical universe, so He also created spiritual laws. One of those spiritual laws is: Sin has consequences. You may not think [a] sin has consequences [when] you first commit it. You think, "Well, I'm not suffering now." You will. You may suffer in this life for it, but you will *certainly* suffer in the life to come. But even then, most people still suffer in this life.

Last week, from [Luke 15:]11–13, we learned about the prodigal's sinful decisions. These [were] multiple decisions—six of them—we looked at that plunged him into being as lost as lost could be. This morning, we want to look at the consequences that came upon him because of those sinful decisions. We're still looking at the dark side of the parable. Next week it starts coming out [to a brighter side], but I just want to remind you that the prodigal was impatiently greedy, he didn't care about others, he thought receiving mercy and grace for a time meant there would be no future judgment, he hid from accountability, he believed sinning would make him happy, and he lived only for the day, thinking nothing of tomorrow.

In the parable [of the prodigal son], we know that the father represents God, the prodigal represents those tax collectors and sinners, and really all of us who, like sheep, go astray [see Isaiah 53:6]. Jesus is trying to show [that] we should rejoice when they come to salvation. The unloving brother, [who] we will get to at the very end [of this portion of Luke], represents the Jewish leaders—the scribes and Pharisees—who grumbled that the sinners were coming to Christ. [He also represents] anybody who thinks [he's] self-righteous and who has no compassion or love for those who are repenting and coming to God.

According to the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy 21:18–21, disobedient sons were to be stoned to death. This is how the Law reads:

If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. They shall say to the elders of his city, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.

Think about how that would curb youth rebellion in our country if we started taking stubborn youth outside the city of Burbank, and all the men of the city show[ed] up to stone them to death. That would be a serious deterrent. But, from what we know, the Jews really didn't practice this. Maybe [they] thought [it] was metaphorical. This was not something they normally did, but what they did do is when a son rebelled and ran away, they would hold a wake for him. [It was something that basically said], “You're dead to me.” They would have a funeral and that would be pretty much it. They would consider him dead.

[In our text], the prodigal has put himself into a position [in which] he should have been stoned to death, [or] at least had a wake [because of] his

rebellion. I'm going to read [Luke 15:]11–16 and you can follow along in your Bibles.

And He said, “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

From verses 14–16, I want to show you six consequences. [Last week] we looked at the six sins [the prodigal committed], and [this week] I found six consequences the prodigal suffered because of th[o]se sinful decisions. I want to point these out for [these] reason[s]. [First], because a lot of times we are tempted to do what the prodigal did—to run out and plunge ourselves into sin, and maybe that's why you're here this morning. Second, you might be a person right now who is plunged into sin. You *are* the prodigal. You are indulging in sin. You know you are and you know God knows you are. Whatever the case, may it be a deterrent to you who are tempted in that direction, may it be a warning to you who are there that you might turn from that lifestyle to avoid worse consequences.

The world never stops telling us that sin is fun; sin is great; sin is stylish; sin will make you happy; sin is so cool; and that morality, honesty, integrity, [and] upright business practices [are] for people who lived in the Elizabethan era. That's Victorian. That's dinosaur. What's wrong with you? If you aren't wicked, immoral, and [a liar] there must be something broken

about your life. But God has built certain consequences into sin to cause us to suffer because of it. Let's look at how this young man suffered because of his sin.

Look at [Luke 15:]14: "Now, when he had spent everything..." We already looked at th[e] first part of verse 14—that was the sixth of the sins he committed. He spent with reckless abandon, with no concern about the future. He was in a foreign country, and [spent] until it was all gone. Now he's poor. It says: "A severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished." Notice here that sin impoverished him. [That's our first point: Sin impoverishes you.] He went after sin, and now where is he? He's impoverished; he's destitute. The prodigal wanted to get away from home, from Dad telling him what to do, Mom telling him what to do, his brother looking down on him, the people in the city, and the old lady around the corner [who was] always saying, "You need to cut your hair! You need to get a job!"

So, he just got out of there with his fortune, because he thought, "This is going to make me happy." A lot of people think that. A lot of people think, "If I could just win the lottery, get this inheritance, do whatever." But you know what? People who receive a large chunk of cash unexpectedly often are bankrupt within one year. It becomes a curse to them. Not only are they bankrupt, [but] they're worse off than when they started except they're beat up because of the journey of having that money trash them for a year. Famous rap singer MC Hammer, after making \$30 million in record sales, spent uncontrollably. He hired so many people to pamper him [that] he was giving out \$500,000 per month to the payroll just to have people do things for him. In 1996 he filed for bankruptcy, telling the courts he was \$13.7 million in debt and couldn't pay his bills.

The prodigal left home with a large inheritance, and soon he was bankrupt. Sin is one of those drinks that only makes you thirstier. It is food that only makes you hungrier. It is pleasure that leaves you unsatisfied, empty, and wanting more. The more you try to satisfy yourself with sin, the more empty and hollow you become. It's like drinking salt water. The more

you drink, it just makes you thirstier still, and if you keep drinking, then you throw it up and you're worse than when you started. The prodigal got just what he wanted. He got his inheritance early. He traveled to a distant country of his choice, he sinned as much as he wanted, when he wanted, and the way he wanted, had all the pleasures of the world, all the sins he could stuff in his body and mind, and it impoverished him.

[In] Isaiah 55:2, God speaks to wayward Israel: "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy?" There is that God-shaped vacuum inside of everyone that only God can satisfy. Proverbs 23:4–5 says: "Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens." Wealth is not something you can keep. Even the richest people, [when they] die, take nothing of it with them.

Also notice the providence of God here [in Luke 15:14–15], as severe famine occurred in that country. Who sends famines? It's not Mother Nature. It's not some natural phenomenon. It is God, who controls the natural phenomenon. In Ezekiel 14:[14-]21, the Lord is talking about how He is going to send these plagues and judgments upon Israel, and He says, "You know what? If Noah were alive and he prayed and Daniel were alive and he prayed, I'd still send [the plagues and judgments], and nothing can stop it." [The verse says]: "For thus says the Lord GOD, 'How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it!' " He just says, "Famines? That's Me. Plagues? That's Me." We live in a world that has denied its Creator. People worship science, and scientists come up with rational explanations of why this happened, or that happened. People talk about "Mother Nature" as if she is some sort of all-powerful, mythological goddess [who] actually does control the weather. There is no Mother Nature. There *is* God. Let's just get it straight. When we hear of floods, tornados, tsunamis, and earthquakes it's God working His good will upon the earth.

You [may] think, “Well, those things don’t seem very good.” [They are] good if you’re a righteous God and men are sinners. We might wonder if God would actually send a famine upon a land because of one wayward Jewish boy because the text says a severe famine came upon that land where he was living. Well, He could if He wanted. We know that. We know He punished all Israel because of Achan’s sin [see Joshua 22:20], so we know He could do it. Most likely, He had a lot of reasons to do it. And, yes, one of them was to get that young man humbled, at the end of his rope, so that he would see his need for a Deliverer, repent, and be saved.

Have you ever prayed, “Lord, bring trial into my life, lots of trial”? Have you ever done that? I don’t do that. I’m looking for ease, pleasure, prosperity, and health. Those are the kinds of things [for which] we tend to pray. We don’t really pray, “Yeah, give me a really bad case of flu this year, could You?” We don’t do that. But you know what? If we were to go around this room, and we were to spend time, and say, “How did you come to the Lord?” we’d find out a lot of you came to the Lord when? Yeah, when you [were in] trials, when you were bottomed out, when your wife left you, when you drugged yourself into the hospital, or whatever. We have trials come upon us, [and] they break us so that we see our need for Christ. In that way, these trials that come upon us and impoverish us are often used by God for our good that He might save us.

[Point two]: We see in the text that sin brings you low. Look at [Luke 15:]15: “So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country.” Think about this. This young man was the son of a very wealthy landowner [and] businessman. The guy ha[d] a lot of money. [The prodigal didn’t] have to work, he [didn’t] need a job [when he was living under his father’s roof]. He ha[d] never had a job before. He just want[ed] his money. But now, [in Luke 15:15, we see that] he has been brought low because he needs a job. He’s starting to starve, and he needs a job. The good thing is [that] at least he’s trying to get a job. A lot of times we don’t do people favors when we just give them handouts and they’re not willing to work. If they can work, they need to work. You don’t do anybody a favor if [he’s]

begging and you give them things if they can work. They *need* to work. It's good to work. God says [people] need to do that. This young man is now at the end of his rope, and he's trying to go around and get some food, but there is a severe famine in the land. No one is giving anything out. Everybody is keeping; no one is giving. He was impoverished, and sin robbed him of everything, and just brought him low.

Vincent, in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, commenting on this phrase "hired himself out," writes: "The verb means to glue or cement. Very expressive here, implying that he forced himself upon the citizen, who was unwilling to engage him, and who took him into service only upon persistent entreaty."¹ [The prodigal] is trying to find a job. I'm sure he probably tried at the beginning to find some upper management position. Of course, he couldn't do that. Nobody was hiring—there was a severe famine in the land. Maybe he tried to get a job in the trades, but it's like, "Listen, you don't have any skills." So, he's desperate, and he's wandering, and he's outside of town. He smells something. It's a pig farm. He's a Jew, and as a Jew, he knows that pigs are unclean animals, but he's so desperate, he is brought so low, [that] he goes to the Gentile pig farmer. Gentiles, because they ate things that were unclean, because they didn't love God, because they didn't obey the Law of Moses, they were unclean, too. So, [the prodigal] goes to an unclean man, who farms unclean animals, and says, "Can you give me a job?"

Of course, the Gentile pig farmer tells him, "No, no, sorry. I'm not hiring anyone. Times are hard."

And so, [the prodigal] begs, he entreats, maybe he even cries, and says, "Please, please, I'm starving! Please!"

So, the pig farmer says, "OK. Listen, I can't pay you. I'll give you a place to sleep, I'll give you water to drink and a small ration of food. The work is going to be hard. You can tend my swine." As [the prodigal] feeds

¹Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Luke 15:15 (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004). Text also available at: <http://www.godrules.net/library/vincent/vincentluk15.htm>

the pigs, he longs to eat what the pigs are eating. The pig farmer is treating his pigs better than [he is] the young man. Sin has reduced this young man to a status lower than swine.

I'm telling you, when Jesus [was] describing this, the scribes, Pharisees, and the [other] people listening to this were surely gasping with disgust. This young man [was] selfish, unloving, unkind to his father, shameful, dishonoring to his mother, his family, his people, [and] Moses. He despised his inheritance, [and] he [ran] off and squander[ed] his inheritance. Now, having spent everything on carnal indulgence, he goes to a defiling Gentile and gets a job feeding pigs! I mean, he is just ick! Proverbs 29:23 says: "A man's pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor." That's exactly what happened. This man's pride brought him low.

Thomas Watson, in his work *The Mischief of Sin*, speaks of how sin brings a person low:

Sin is the womb of sorrow and the grave of comfort. Sin turns the body into a hospital. It causes fevers, ulcers, and [seizures]. Sin buries the name, melts the estate, pulls away near relations like limbs from our body.

Sin is the Trojan horse out of which the whole troop of afflictions comes. Sin drowned the old world and burnt Sodom. . . . Sin shut up God's compassion. . . . Israel sinned and did not repent, and God killed and did not pity. Sin is the great humbler.

Did not David's sin bring him low? Psa. 38:3, "There is no rest in my bones because of my sin." Did not Manasseh's sin bring him low? It changed his royal crown into fetters, II Chron. 33:11. For sin, God turned King Nebuchadnezzar to [eat] grass, Dan. 4:33.

Sin is like the Egyptian reed—too feeble to support us but sharp enough to wound us.²

That is exactly how sin is. Sin is one of those Trojan horses, where it promises us all sorts of great things, but in the end, it just brings us low. If we don't deal with it in this life, it will bring us all the way to hell.

Third [point]: Sin defiles you. Look in the middle of [Luke 15:]15: “And he sent him into his fields to feed swine.” As we just mentioned, pigs were [considered] unclean. These swine were unclean animals. [The prodigal was] working for an unclean Gentile. He [was] defiled. Sin ha[d] brought him to a place of ultra defilement. Deuteronomy 14:8, in the Law, says you aren't to eat the pig because “it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, it is unclean for you. You shall not eat any of their flesh nor touch their carcasses.” Jews wouldn't even go near them. The Pharisees surely were [thinking], “Ewww,” as Jesus [was] painting the picture in the most gruesome tones because He [was] trying to first get them to feel the ultimate disgust for the prodigal so that he [could] contrast that with the grace of the father, which we'll be seeing in a couple weeks. Sin is defiling, it taints our reputation, it besmears our character, it twists our thinking, it makes us [impure], used, damaged goods.

It would be like newlyweds, [after] they [had gotten] married, [went] on their honeymoon, c[a]me back, and they need[ed] a bed [for their home]. The bride says, “We need to go shopping for a bed.”

[Her new husband says], “Honey, I'll take care of it. I'll go get you one.” So he goes to the city dump, and there in the city dump he waits and waits until somebody comes up in an old pickup truck full of junk, and kicks out this old, nasty mattress. It's all stained, tattered, and smells like the landfill, or worse. He grabs it, lashes it onto his car, drives it home, and honks the horn. His wife comes out. Now, is she going to be happy about that? No, she's not going to be happy about that. Why? [It is] because that thing is

²Thomas Watson, *The Mischief of Sin* (Orlando, FL: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1994), p. 6. Text also available at: http://www.gracegems.org/Watson/mischief_of_sin.htm

defiled. It is nasty. She's not going to sleep on that. That's what sin does to us in the eyes of other people and especially in the eyes of God: it makes us nasty, defiled, tattered, [and] stained.

The Lord, in Isaiah 65:1–5, [spoke] to wayward Israel, who had plunged themselves into sin. This is like so many times you read things in the Bible, and [think], “You just need to put this in the front page of the *LA Times* in big print.”

I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, “Here am I, here am I,” To a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, A people who continually provoke Me to My face, Offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks; Who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; Who eat swine's flesh, And the broth of unclean meat is in their pots. Who say, “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, For I am holier than you!” These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day.

God says [that] when we sin, we are a stench, a defiling stench, in His nostrils. That is the picture of our whole country, but it is [also] the picture of any sinner because we're all prodigals. We are all born into this world [as] prodigals. Sin defiles us, and makes us like smoke in the nostrils of a holy God.

[Point] four: Sin leaves you wanting. Look at [Luke 15:]16: “And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating.” Notice [that] though he forced himself upon the Gentile pig farmer, he's still not getting enough food. Young men eat a lot. I know this—I've got two of them. This young man is hungry, but he can't get enough food. He's hungering for the pig slop here. He wants to eat what they're eating.

This is what sin does. It drives you into the middle of the desert and kicks you out of the car. It leaves you in the gutter coughing up blood. It fries your brain and wastes your body. It leaves you wanting, worse off than when you started. There's some irony here, isn't there? When he was living at home, what did he have? Anything he wanted—all the food he wanted, pleasure, relaxation, a rich dad, a loving mother, [and] kind neighbors. Now what does he have? He's lusting for pig slop. He wants to eat with the pigs. Yeah, when he had his money, he had all the clothes, food, sexual pleasure, and drunkenness that money could buy, [but] now he's in greater want than he ever was at home.

Proverbs 30:15 says: "The leech has two daughters, 'Give,' 'Give.'" You know what? That's what sin is. It's the leech, and it will take from you everything you have and give you nothing in return. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 5:10: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income." He was the one who could tell you that for certain. He was the richest man who ever lived. He had everything he ever could have grasped, with money, power, position, and fame. God has made man so that there is only one thing that will satisfy his soul. The world says, "Oh, this sin will satisfy you. Oh, this indulgence will satisfy. These drugs, this drunkenness, this whatever will satisfy you." No, it won't. It will just give you momentary pleasure and then leave you emptier than you began.

Full satisfaction can never be had in this life. It only comes in the life to come to those who place their faith in Christ Jesus. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" [Matthew 5:6]. This world, this sin-cursed world, and all it contains doesn't work. It'll never work. It'll just leave you empty and wanting more.

Peter describes those poor souls who get religious for a while. They learn about the Word of God, they come into the church, they get excited about Christianity and the Bible, and they start learning stuff, and then turn away from their sin. Then they start longing for the sins that they for a time left behind. He describes, then, in 2 Peter 2:22: "It has happened to them

according to the true proverb, *'a dog returns to its own vomit,'* and, *'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'*” If you’ve ever had a dog, you know what this means, and it’s pretty sick, isn’t it? You think once you got rid of that nasty thing you just hacked up, you wouldn’t go back and eat it, but that’s exactly what [dogs] do.

If you’ve ever been to the fair, and you’ve seen those little, cute kids with the 4-H pigs, [those pigs] are squeaky clean. They’re like the nicest little bundles of pink joy you’ve ever laid your eyes on. They’re cute as they “Oink, oink, oink, oink,” around. You just think, “Man, pigs are clean!” That’s because [their owners] scrub them all the time and keep them in a pen. They keep putting fresh straw and wood chips in there to keep them looking good so they can sell them to somebody who [then] finds out what they’re really like. I’m telling you, if you took one of those squeaky clean pigs into a field [that] had nice clean straw and wood chips in one half and stinky trash and filthy mire in the other half and let them go, they wouldn’t go for the wood chips and straw. I know this, having raised pigs. I used to take them out and hose them off with a high-pressure nozzle. They’d look good for about ten seconds, and then “whoosh” [they’d be] into the mud, roll[ing] around, and [thinking], “Ha! I’m back!” That’s what they like. Now, imagine just sitting there as pigs are in that mire, and you want to eat with them. They’re not all that clean, you know. The young man is reduced to such want he wishes he could get in there and have a little bit of food with them. That’s what sin did [to him].

[Point five]: Sin leaves you friendless. Look at the end of [Luke 15:]16: “And no one was giving anything to him.” Where were all his friends? Where were all his drinking buddies? Where were all the prostitutes who really liked him when he had money? They’re gone. They’re leeching off the next rich fool who came around to squander his inheritance. They’ve dumped him. He’s old news. Oh, sure, they’re willing to put up with him and his pride, arrogance, and self-thought importance while he’s spending money so that they can leech off of the cash that’s falling out of his pockets, but as soon as the well runs dry, [they say], “Later, guy.”

You take a young man, you don't train him, you don't teach him responsibility and give him a bunch of cash. [He] become[s a] proud, arrogant, boastful, young spoiled brat with [a] head the size of [a] beach ball. Then [he] just look[s] down at all the other little people who don't have what [he has], as if money gives [him] character, as if money should make us honor [him]. But you know what? [That is] the very [type] of people [who] are on all the magazines and tabloids, right? All those spoiled little girls with too much money, who do immoral things are constantly on the front covers of those magazines.

Surely the prodigal was [un]bearable when he had money. So, now that his money is gone, all those people he used and abused have all left him. Proverbs 14:20 says: "The poor is hated even by his neighbor, But those who love the rich are many." [If] you're rich, everybody wants to be your friend [because] they might get something from you. Yeah, he was rich, and had many "friends," but now that he's not rich, he is hated. None of his friends are saying, "Now, listen, I know you had some hard times. We really had good times together, some good drinking parties. Why don't you come live with me?" [No], they're [saying], "Get out of here, loser!" He's friendless. He doesn't have a friend [in] the world.

If you're around alcoholics and drug addicts, you see this firsthand. First they start getting into their drug of choice, and they're able to function. They have family who love them, friends who love them, [and] coworkers [who also care about them]. They're close to a lot of people. Pretty soon, [however], their sin starts taking control of them, and they start loving their sin more than [they do] their family. Then what happens is they begin to neglect their family, and then when their family says, "Your drinking, your drug abuse... [we] think you need to stop this," they start despising those who really love them and do them good. [They] drive them away, and pretty soon, they don't have any friends. They walk around all by themselves because their family is nothing but a bunch of troublesome meddlers. Soon, [their] only friend is [their] beer, or glass of wine, or the next hit of cocaine. They are alone, and they are friendless. Their pursuit of pleasure has driven

away anybody who loves them. The only friends they can find are those who are willing to share their drugs with them until they run out, and then those friends run away. So, sin first becomes your friend, and then becomes your master, and then it becomes a tyrant, and then it becomes the prison warden, and it puts you in solitary confinement. There you are, alone, with your sin.

[Point] six: Sin blinds you. When sin has you in its grips, it pulls a black sack over your head, and you have no idea what's going on. The church of Laodicea was [an] extremely rich church. [It was] like this church, or [a] church [in] Beverly Hills. Jesus said to them, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" [Revelation 3:17]. They're naked. Their sinful indulgence had totally blinded them to their true spiritual condition. This is what sin does.

The prodigal has lusted after sin, he has brazenly gone after it, and now he is reduced to utter blindness. He still doesn't realize that the person he is really sinning against is God. He's sinning against God. You would think that some people, after sinning, after suffering, after hurting so much because of their sin would cease and take a different path. But usually they don't. That is what is really amazing. They don't take a different path.

You read about it in Proverbs [23:35], about the guy who drinks, and drinks, and drinks, and drinks and falls down and hits his head, and people beat him. He wakes up, and says what? "Give me another drink." It's like, uh, that's not very smart. They just can't see it. If they do make a change of direction, they do it in their own power, [thinking], "I'm going to lick this thing on my own. I'm going to pull myself up by my own bootstraps, and I'm going to quit taking my cocaine." Then they adopt [something like] alcoholism. They switch one addiction for another. They run from the bear into the mouth of the lion [see Amos 5:19]. Psalm 82:5 describes them: "They do not know nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness."

The Apostle Paul describes unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 4:4 with these words: "In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the

unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Sin clouds your vision, it blinds you to the truth, it distorts things. You can’t see.

I imagine there are some here this morning who are probably in that very condition. You may not even know why you’re here. You’re thinking, “Why did I come here, anyway? This guy is psychotic. Why am I here?” Or, maybe you come to church to try and ease your conscience, but inside you know you don’t know God, you know you don’t love God because your whole life is spent in the thought of, pursuit [of], and worship of sin. It has you, it has impoverished you, it is taking you down, it is bringing you low, it is making you friendless, and here you are. Why? [You are here] because God’s providence has led you here so that you can hear what I’m going to tell you right now. It is this. Though sin impoverishes you, Jesus enriches you. Jesus is the pearl of great price [see Matthew 13:46]. He is the hidden treasure [see Matthew 13:44]. He is the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden [see Colossians 2:2–3]. He is the one who will grant you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ [see Ephesians 1:3]. You come to Jesus and He will make you a child of the King. Sin brings you low; Jesus exalts you. [If] you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt you in due time [see 1 Peter 5:6]. He will make you a kingdom of priests, a royal priesthood [see 1 Peter 2:9]. You will rule and reign with Christ forever.

Sin defiles you, but Jesus washes you whiter than snow [see Psalm 51:7]. He cleanses you from all unrighteousness in His blood [see 1 John 1:9]. He forgives you of every trespass. He nails it to the cross. He makes you perfect and clothes you with His perfect righteousness [see Isaiah 61:10]. Sin leaves you wanting, but Jesus leaves you satisfied. He is the fountain that if a man drinks it will be a well in him that springs up into eternal life [see John 4:14]. He will fill your soul. Sin leaves you friendless, but Jesus is that friend that sticks closer than a brother [see Proverbs 18:24]. If you come to Christ, you come to the family of God. You have all the saints that live on earth, and all the saints that have died and gone to

heaven, and all the myriads and myriads and 10,000s upon 10,000s of angels who are all your friends now [see Daniel 7:10], and you haven't even met them.

Sin blinds you, but Jesus gives you sight. You remember the Christmas text in Isaiah: "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" [Isaiah 9:6]. Do you know what it says right before that? It says this about the land of the Gentiles. This is actually where Jesus is ministering, by the way, in the parable of the prodigal son. He's in Perea, the land of the Gentiles, and this is what it says in Isaiah 9:1–2. He is fulfilling this prophecy. "On the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them." That's who Jesus is: the light that shines on those who walk in darkness.

Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 8:12: "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." He will make you see. You'll be like that blind man who, after Jesus healed him, went to the priests, and said, "All I know is I once was blind, but now I can see" [see John 9:25]. It all happens by placing your faith in Christ. The reason Jesus came to this world is so that He could die to free you from the consequences of your sin, to redeem prodigals. He didn't come to save any righteous people. None. You have to be a sinner, you have to be a prodigal, you have to hit rock bottom, and then He'll save you. That's why He lived a perfect life, that's why He died on the cross for our sins, that's why we celebrate communion—because He sets the captive free [see Psalm 146:7]. "His blood can make the foulest clean" [see the hymn "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing"].

We're all born into this world [as] prodigals, but Christ was born into this world to save prodigals. He is the answer. He is what satisfies. If you've never given your life to Christ, what are you waiting for? It's good. It's

really good. It's not only good in this life, but it is *unimaginably* good in the life to come.

In his *One Minute Uplift* newsletter, Rick Ezell writes this:

In the highlands of Scotland, sheep often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they can't get out of. The grass on these mountains tastes very sweet, and the sheep like it. They will jump down ten or twelve feet to a ledge with a patch of grass, and then they can't jump back up again. The shepherd hears them bleating in distress.

Let me just stop there. Think about this. Why would God let somebody suffer? Why would He let [someone] run off into sin? Why doesn't He rescue [him] the moment [he] start[s] falling into sin, and sinful indulgence, and addictions, or whatever it is? Why doesn't He just rescue [him]? Listen as Ezell goes on to say:

The shepherd may leave them there for days, until they have eaten all the grass and are so faint that they cannot stand. Only then will the shepherd put a rope around the sheep and pull them up out of the jaws of death.

Why doesn't the shepherd attempt a rescue when the sheep first get into the predicament? The sheep are so foolish and so focused on eating that they would dash away from the shepherd, go over the precipice and destroy themselves.

Such is the case with us. Sometimes we need to experience a little bit of death before we can enjoy the abundance of life. The Lord will rescue us the moment we have given up trying, realizing that we can't liberate ourselves, and cry to him for help.

For many of us, it's only when all else fails and we hit rock bottom, that we turn to God for help, but that's a good thing

because only God can rescue us from the jaws of eternal death and damnation.³

God builds consequences into sin, and He lets us suffer them so that we can come to rock bottom, see our need for a Savior, and turn to Him. If you've never done that, do it now. Jesus would be more than happy to save you, transform you, adopt you, and turn you into a completely new person by His grace, if you're willing to believe and receive Him as your Savior. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this sobering reminder of the consequences of sin that we saw in this young man's life. And, Father, all of us have suffered the consequences of sin to one degree or another. We have all gone astray like sheep, each has turned to his own way, and then we suffer. But we know that You cause the iniquity of us all to fall on You [see Isaiah 53:6], that You were crushed for our iniquity, that the chastening of our well being fell on You so that by Your stripes we could be healed. And, Father, I pray that if there [are people] here who ha[ve] never turned from their sins and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, may You grant them repentance, may they believe in Jesus, may they receive Him as their Savior, trusting only in Him. And, Father, change them and make them new, as we know You will if they cry out. And for the rest of us, as we see the world begging us, drawing us, tempting us to sin, may we remember those painful consequences, and may we run to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith [see Hebrews 12:12]. And, Father, in doing that, may we have true peace, true joy until we see our Savior face-to-face, and have perfect happiness for all eternity. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible®, ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, by The Lockman Foundation.

³You can subscribe to Rick Ezell's *One Minute Uplift* newsletter at:
<http://www.rickezell.net/subscribe.html>