

Andrew Murray:

“And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine .” —Luke 15:31.

The words of the text are familiar to us all. The elder son had complained and said, that though his father had made a feast, and had killed the fatted calf for the prodigal son, he had never given him even a kid that he might make merry with his friends. The answer of the father was: “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine .” One cannot have a more wonderful revelation of the heart of our Father in heaven than this points out to us. We often speak of the wonderful revelation of the father’s heart in his welcome to the prodigal son, and in what he did for him. But here we have a revelation of the father’s love far more wonderful, in what he says to the elder son.

If we are to experience a deepening of spiritual life, we want to discover clearly what is the spiritual life that God would have us live, on the one hand; and, on the other, to ask whether we are living that life; or, if not, what hinders us living it out fully.

This subject naturally divides itself into these three heads:—1. The high privilege of every child of God. 2. The low experience of too many of us believers. 3. The cause of the discrepancy; and, lastly, The way to the restoration of the privilege.

#### I. THE HIGH PRIVILEGE OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

We have here two things describing the privilege: —First, “Son, thou art ever with me”—unbroken fellowship with thy Father is thy portion; Second, “All that I have is thine ”—all that God can bestow upon His children is theirs.

“Thou art ever with me;” I am always near thee; thou canst dwell every hour of thy life in My presence, and all I have is for thee. I am a father, with a loving father’s heart. I will withhold no good thing from thee. In these promises, we have the rich privilege of God’s heritage. We have, in the first place, unbroken fellowship with Him. A father never sends his child away with the thought that he does not care about his child knowing that he loves him. The father longs to have his child believe that he has the light of his father’s countenance upon him all the day—that, if he sends the child away to school, or anywhere that necessity compels, it is with a sense of sacrifice of parental feelings. If it be so with an earthly father, what think you of God? Does He not want every child of His to know that he is constantly living in the light of His countenance? This is the meaning of that word, “Son, thou art ever with me.”

That was the privilege of God’s people in Old Testament times. We are told that “Enoch walked with God.” God’s promise to Jacob was: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest , and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” And God’s promise to Israel through Moses, was: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” And in Moses’ response to the promise, he says, “For wherein shall it be known that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not that Thou goest with us; so shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.” The presence of God with Israel was the mark of their separation from other people. This is the truth taught in all the Old Testament; and if so, how much more may we look for it in the New Testament? Thus we find our Saviour promising to those who love Him and who keep His word, that the Father also will love them, and Father and Son will come and make Their abode with them.

Let that thought into your hearts—that the child of God is called to this blessed privilege, to live every moment of his life in fellowship with God. He is called to enjoy the full light of His countenance. There are many Christians—I suppose the majority of Christians—who seem to regard the whole of the Spirit’s work as confined to conviction and conversion: —not so much that He came to dwell in our hearts, and there reveal God to us. He came not to dwell near us, but in us, that we might be filled with His indwelling. We are commanded to be “filled with the Spirit;” then the Holy Spirit would make God’s presence manifest to us. That is the whole teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews: —the veil is rent in twain; we have access into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus; we come into the very presence of God, so that we can live all the day with that presence resting upon us. That presence is with us wheresoever we go; and in all kinds of trouble, we have undisturbed repose and peace. “Son, thou art ever with me.”

There are some people who seem to think that God, by some unintelligible sovereignty, withdraws His face. But

I know that God loves His people too much to withhold His fellowship from them for any such reason. The true reason of the absence of God from us is rather to be found in our sin and unbelief, than in any supposed sovereignty of His. If the child of God is walking in faith and obedience, the Divine presence will be enjoyed in unbroken continuity.

Then there is the next blessed privilege: "All that I have is thine." Thank God, He has given us His own Son; and in giving Him, He has given us all things that are in Him, He has given us Christ's life, His love, His Spirit, His glory. "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." All the riches of His Son, the everlasting King, God bestows upon every one of His children. "Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine." Is not that the meaning of all those wonderful promises given in connection with prayer: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, ye shall receive"? Yes, there it is. That is the life of the children of God, as He Himself has pictured it to us.

2. In contrast with this high privilege of believers, look at

#### THE LOW EXPERIENCE OF TOO MANY OF US.

The elder son was living with his father and serving him "these many years," and he complains that his father never gave him a kid, while he gave his prodigal brother the fatted calf. Why was this? Simply because he did not ask it. He did not believe that he would get it, and therefore never asked it, and never enjoyed it. He continued thus to live in constant murmuring and dissatisfaction; and the keynote of all this wretched life is furnished in what he said. His father gave him everything, yet he never enjoyed it; and he throws the whole blame on his loving and kind father. O beloved, is not that the life of many a believer? Do not many speak and act in this way? Every believer has the promise of unbroken fellowship with God, but he says, "I have not enjoyed it; I have tried hard and done my best, and I have prayed for the blessing, but I suppose God does not see fit to grant it." But why not? One says, it is the sovereignty of God withholding the blessing. The father withheld not his gifts from the elder brother in sovereignty; neither does our Heavenly Father withhold any good thing from them that love Him. He does not make any such differences between His children. "He is able to make all grace abound towards you" was the promise equally made to all in the Corinthian church.

Some think these rich blessings are not for them, but for those who have more time to devote to religion and prayer; or their circumstances are so difficult, so peculiar, that we can have no conception of their various hindrances. But do not such think that God, if He places them in these circumstances, cannot make His grace abound accordingly? They admit He could if He would, work a miracle for them, which they can hardly expect. In some way, they, like the elder son, throw the blame on God. Thus many are saying, when asked if they are enjoying unbroken fellowship with God: "Alas, no! I have not been able to attain to such a height; it is too high for me. I know of some who have it, and I read of it; but God has not given it to me, for some reason." But why not? You think, perhaps, that you have not the same capacity for spiritual blessing that others have. The Bible speaks of a joy that is "unspeakable and full of glory" as the fruit of believing; of a "love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us." Do we desire it, do we? Why not get it? Have we asked for it? We think we are not worthy of the blessing—we are not good enough; and therefore God has not given it. There are more among us than we know of, or are willing to admit, who throw the blame of our darkness, and of our wanderings on God! Take care! Take care! Take care!

And again, what about that other promise? The Father says, "All I have is thine." Are you rejoicing in the treasures of Christ? Are you conscious of having an abundant supply for all your spiritual needs every day? God has all these for you in abundance. "Thou never gavest me a kid!" The answer is, "All that I have is thine. I gave it thee in Christ."

Dear reader, we have such wrong thoughts of God. What is God like? I know no image more beautiful and instructive than that of the sun. The sun is never weary of shining;—of pouring out his beneficent rays upon both the good and the evil. You might close up the windows with blinds or bricks, the sun would shine upon them all the same; though we might sit in darkness, in utter darkness, the shining would be just the same. God's sun shines on every leaf; on every flower; on every blade of grass; on everything that springs out of the ground. All receive this wealth of sunshine until they grow to perfection and bear fruit. Would He who made that sun be less willing to pour out His love and life into me? The sun—what beauty it creates! And my God,—would He not delight more in creating a beauty and a fruitfulness in me?—Such, too, as He has promised to give? And yet some say, when asked why they do not live in unbroken communion with God, "God does not give it to me, I do not know why; but that is the only reason I can give you—He has not given it to me." You remember the parable of the one who said, "I know thou art an hard master, reaping where thou hast not sown and gathering where thou hast not strawed," asking and demanding what thou hast not given. Oh! Let

us come and ask why it is that the believer lives such a low experience.

### 3. THE CAUSE OF THIS DISCREPANCY BETWEEN GOD'S GIFTS, AND OUR LOW EXPERIENCE.

The believer is complaining that God has never given him a kid. Or, God has given him some blessing, but has never given the full blessing. He has never filled him with His Spirit. "I never," he says, "had my heart, as a fountain, giving forth the rivers of living water promised in John vii. 38." What is the cause? The elder son thought he was serving his father faithfully "these many years" in his father's house, but it was in the spirit of bondage and not in the spirit of a child, so that his unbelief blinded him to the conception of a father's love and kindness, and he was unable all the time to see that his father was ready, not only to give him a kid, but a hundred, or a thousand kids, if he would have them. He was simply living in unbelief, in ignorance, in blindness, robbing himself of the privileges that the father had for him. So, if there be a discrepancy between our life and the fulfillment and enjoyment of all God's promises, the fault is ours. If our experience be not what God wants it to be, it is because of our unbelief in the love of God, in the power of God, and in the reality of God's promises.

God's word teaches us, in the story of the Israelites, that it was unbelief on their part that was the cause of their troubles, and not any limitation or restriction on God's part. As Psalm 78th says:—"He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers." Yet they sinned by doubting His power to provide meat for them—"They spake against God; they said, can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (vs. 15-19). Later on, we read in v. 41, "They turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel." They kept distrusting Him from time to time. When they got to Kadesh-Barnea, and God told them to enter the land flowing with milk and honey where there would be rest, abundance, and victory, only two men said, "Yes;" we can take possession, for God can make us conquer." But the ten spies, and the six hundred thousand men answered, "No; we can never take the land; the enemies are too strong for us." It was simply unbelief that kept them out of the land of promise.

If there is to be any deepening of the spiritual life in us, we must come to the discovery, and the acknowledgment of the unbelief there is in our hearts. God grant that we may get this spiritual quickening, and that we may come to see that it is by our unbelief that we have prevented God from doing His work in us. Unbelief is the mother of disobedience, and of all my sins and shortcomings—my temper, my pride, my unlovingness, my worldliness, my sins of every kind. Though these differ in nature and form, yet they all come from the one root, viz, that we do not believe in the freedom and fullness of the Divine gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and strengthen us, and fill us with the life and grace of God all the day long. Look, I pray you, at that elder son, and ask what was the cause of that terrible difference between the heart of the father and the experience of the son. There can be no answer but that it was this sinful unbelief that utterly blinded the son to a sense of his father's love.

Dear fellow believer, I want to say to you, that, if you are not living in the joy of God's salvation, the entire cause is your unbelief. You do not believe in the mighty power of God, and that He is willing by His Holy Spirit to work a thorough change in your life, and enable you to live in fullness of consecration to Him. God is willing that you should so live; but you do not believe it. If men really believed in the infinite love of God, what a change it would bring about! What is love? It is a desire to communicate oneself for the good of the object loved—the opposite to selfishness; as we read in 1 Cor. xiii. "Love seeketh not her own." Thus the mother is willing to sacrifice herself for the good of her child. So God in His love is ever willing to impart blessing; and He is omnipotent in His love. This is true, my friends; God is omnipotent in love, and He is doing His utmost to fill every heart in this house. "But if God is really anxious to do that, and if He is Almighty, why does He not do it now?" You must remember, that God has given you a will, and by the exercise of that will, you can hinder God, and remain content, like the elder son, with the low life of unbelief. Come, now, and let us see the cause of the difference between God's high, blessed provision for His children, and the low, sad experience of many of us in the unbelief that distrusts and grieves Him.

### 4. THE WAY OF RESTORATION—HOW IS THAT TO BE BROUGHT ABOUT?

We all know the parable of the prodigal son and how many sermons have been preached about repentance, from that parable. We are told that "he came to himself and said, I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." In preaching, we speak of this as the first step in a changed life—as conversion, as repentance, confession, returning to God. But, as this is the first step for the prodigal, we must remember that this is also the step to be taken by His erring children—by all the ninety-nine "who need no repentance," or think they do not. Those Christians who do not understand how

wrong their low religious life is must be taught that this is sin—unbelief; and that it is as necessary that they should be brought to repentance as the prodigal. You have heard a great deal of preaching repentance to the unconverted; but I want to try to preach it to God's children. We have a picture of so many of God's children in that elder brother. What the father told him, to bring about a consideration of the love that He bore him, just as he loved the prodigal brother, thus does God tell to us in our contentedness with such a low life: —“You must repent and believe that I love you, and all that I have is thine .” He says, “By your unbelief, you have dishonoured me, living for ten, twenty, or thirty years, and never believing what it was to live in the blessedness of My love. You must confess the wrong you have done Me in this, and be broken down in contrition of heart just as truly as the prodigal.”

There are many children of God who need to confess, that though they are His children, they have never believed that God's promises are true, that He is willing to fill their hearts all the day long with His blessed presence. Have you believed this? If you have not, all our teaching will be of no profit to you. Will you not say, “By the help of God, I will begin now a new life of faith, and will not rest until I know what such a life means. I will believe that I am every moment in the Father's presence, and all that He has is mine?”

May the Lord God work this conviction in the hearts of all cold believers. Have you ever heard the expression, “a conviction for sanctification?” You know, the unconverted man needs a conviction before conversion. So does the dark-minded Christian need conviction before, and in order for sanctification, before he comes to a real insight to spiritual blessedness. He must be convicted a second time because of his sinful life of doubt, and temper, and unlovingness . He must be broken down under that conviction; then there is hope for him. May the Father of mercy grant all such that deep contrition, so that they may be led into the blessedness of His presence, and enjoy the fullness of His power and love!