

THE PRODIGAL FATHER AS TOLD BY HIS SON

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In the middle of March on a raw overcast day, I was driving from Indianapolis to Columbus, Ohio. I had left home about 7 A.M. with the intention of giving my father the gospel of Jesus Christ, if God would only give me the opening. I had no specific plans. I had told God that nothing I could say would be effective. My father had long proclaimed himself an atheist who had no use for God in his life. As I drove, I told God that if He made an opening I would speak; but otherwise, I would say nothing about Him or the Bible to the sin-hardened man.

I arrived at the door of my father's modest apartment in a rundown building about 10 A.M. I knocked and my father opened the door. I knew him immediately although I had not seen him for about 30 years. I walked to him, put my arms around him and gave him a good hug. He preceded me into the kitchen where we sat at the table and talked until noon. He invited me to have a bowl of canned oyster soup. Because he was likable, articulate and very sociable, we continued to talk about almost everything under the sun except God. The spiritual opening I was looking for had not come.

Then, from out of left field, my father said, "You think I don't know anything about the Bible, don't you?" (He seemed to reason in his heart "otherwise, Gene would have been talking to me about the Bible").

I had no idea where it would lead but I sensed God impressing my mind with: "Don't deny his question. Instead ask him what he knows about the Bible."

When I asked the question, he responded, "I know about the Prodigal Son."

Again God impressed me to say, "Take your Bible, turn to Luke 15 and read the story about the prodigal son to him." Having done that I had no idea what to do next. Then God brought to my mind this thought, "Ask your dad if he knows what the prodigal son's name is."

I asked. My father answered, "Well, I certainly did not catch his name while you were reading. I did not think he had a name."

Not knowing where this was leading, I followed the Spirit's urging and strongly insisted that the prodigal son did indeed have a name.

"Well, if he has a name, tell me!" Dad said emphatically.

Now what was I to say? "Tell him, and speak firmly, '**The prodigal son's name is Oscar Kimble.**'" The result of that statement on my father was astounding. He sat there stunned. Motionless. Staring straight ahead at nothing, his mouth was hanging open.

When I was in the eighth grade my father had left my mother and his six children. Since that time there had been no birthday or Christmas cards, no letters, no phone calls, no money. Neither had he contacted any of his own siblings or many friends. No one knew his whereabouts. He had been born to a financially secure family. At one time the town where we lived had been named Kimble after my father's grandfather. My father was the youngest child in his family, with good ability and a great personality. However, he was petted and spoiled by his older sisters and elderly parents and as a result failed to develop character or a sense of responsibility toward his family. So at age 38 he left his

family—parents, sisters, wife and children—and wandered alone in the world living in the pig trough of society.

About a month before the day I drove to Columbus, I had spent a week developing a Sunday school lesson on “Grace.” As I was putting the finishing touches on the lesson on either Friday or Saturday night, God impressed upon my mind this question, “What would be the greatest manifestation of My grace that you could think of?”

I had a tremendous need—perhaps more than at anytime in my life—for God’s special grace. However, I knew that to apply this grace to myself would be untruthful. So lowly, yet audibly, I said “For my father to be saved.” (I didn’t even know whether or not he was alive.) “If he is alive and You do save him, I’ll tell about it wherever I go.”

The very next Monday or Tuesday evening my older sister Deane called and in great excitement asked, “Guess who I have been talking with?” I did not need to ask; I knew. She gave me our father’s telephone number and over the next four weeks I talked to him several times but did not mention that I was coming to visit.

Now, I was sitting at the kitchen table across from him. His mouth was still ajar, his body motionless—too stunned for words upon discovering that **he** was the prodigal son who had wandered from his father’s house of plenty, who was living in a second-class apartment with lungs half useless from emphysema and an oxygen tank to help him breathe.

The long silence grew embarrassing. Instinctively, however, I knew the words that needed to be said, “Dad, you know that God spoke to you just now. What are you going to do about it?”

Then the battle began. He wanted to repent by going back and setting right all past wrongs he had committed against his family before he would consider salvation. I responded, “I didn’t bring up the subject of the prodigal son. You did. You asked me to tell you his name. You’re talking to the wrong person! It was God Who convinced you that you are the prodigal son who needs to come home. So tell Him what you are not going to do!”

Following another long pause, I said, “Dad, you and I both know that God spoke strongly and emphatically to your heart. It’s all over your face. What are you going to do about it?”

He said with determination, “Since you put it that way, I’m going to accept Him.” My dad had been willing to repent, so now all he had to do was to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and confess with his mouth Him Who is God’s mighty power unto salvation. He prayed. He then raised his head and with tears rolling down his cheeks, said, “I have many friends and I know what friendship is. This is more than friendship. This is love.”

A few days later, Dad told my younger brother Ben about his spiritual new birth. Ben bought Dad a large print Bible which he continued to read until he died almost exactly one year later. The ex-prodigal went home to live in his Father’s house where a ring, a robe and a fatted calf on a table of plenty awaited him—a home to which he had gained admittance by God’s grace alone.

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