Luke - Commentaries by Alexander Hume Rule

Things New and Old: Volume 29, Advocate With the Father, An

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I repeat, the action of the Advocate does not wait for our repentance and confession. We may take the case of Peter as an illustration. Before he had committed the terrible sin of denying his Lord, Jesus said to him, “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.” He was indeed on the way to this sin, being filled with self-confidence, and he needed to be sifted, and the sifting was allowed to take place; but Jesus prayed for him before he fell into the hands of Satan, and his faith did not fail. He was indeed sifted, but his faith was sustained even in that dark hour when Satan would have filled him with despair. At the suited moment Jesus looked on him, and His words were brought to his remembrance, and then “Peter went out and wept bitterly.” Here was indeed repentance, but it was the fruit of the Lord’s intercession, and not what led to it. Afterward Peter was restored. There was the message to him from the risen Lord by the women, and the Lord appearing to him first of all the apostles, and, last of all, the probing of Peter’s heart to reach the root of the evil; but in all this we see only the Lord’s own action in meeting Peter’s need. And He meets our need too, when we, like Peter, have turned aside. It is a service of perfect love, and unmixed grace, not waiting for anything in us, save the need which arises from our failure and sin, and even this it anticipates, as we have seen in the case of Peter.

We may now look a little at the ground of this service of our blessed Lord. Our Advocate is “Jesus Christ the righteous.” The righteous One represents us: “as he is so are we.” He is our life and our righteousness. We are in Him, the righteous One, and thus stand before God in immutable righteousness. “And he is the propitiation for our sins.” He has suffered for our sins, the Just for the unjust, has borne them in His own body on the tree, and has perfectly glorified God about them; and His presence on high is the witness of our perfect acceptance in Him, according to the value of His propitiatory sacrifice. On the ground of this, He maintains our cause on high, and, if we have sinned, secures our restoration to communion.

It is important to see that His advocacy is not in any sense to atone for our sins, as if they were imputed to us. He atoned for our sins once in His death on the cross, and this can never be repeated. By that one sacrifice all our sins are covered, and there can be no imputation of guilt to the believer; as it is written, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin;” and again, “Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more.” We have been pardoned and justified, and are in Christ, according to divine righteousness; so that the advocacy of Christ can have nothing to do with satisfying God about guilt, or securing pardon for us, as if sin had been imputed to us. Even the sins we may commit after having believed, were all covered by the death of Christ, and they are not imputed to us; but they hinder communion with God, and this is an immense loss to our souls. It is God’s good pleasure that we should be in communion with Himself, and that our joy should be full. But practical holiness in us is absolutely necessary for this, because God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. We cannot go on in sin, and have communion with Him, and hence, if we sin, we need to be restored, so as to enjoy afresh the communion we have lost. And for this Jesus our Advocate intercedes, on the ground of the fact, that we are in relationship with God according to divine righteousness, and according to the value of His propitiatory sacrifice.

And now a word as to the action of restoring grace. Jesus Christ the righteous is our Advocate with the Father, and His plea for restoration cannot fail. But there is also the action of the Lord’s grace towards us when overtaken in sin. A beautiful picture of this action is given us in John 13, where the blessed Lord washes the feet of His disciples. Peter did not understand then, but would understand it afterward. He also, in his ignorance and pride of heart, resisted the Lord’s action, saying, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” But “Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Peter then desired Him to wash his head and hands also; but Jesus again answered, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit, and ye are clean, but not all.’ All, except Judas the betrayer, were already washed, and were “clean every whit.” They were clean through the word which Jesus had spoken to them. (Chap. 15:3.) They were born again—born of water (a figure of the word) and of the Spirit—and thus were clean. We are born again but once, and in this get a new and clean nature, and thus are washed all over. But washing of the feet applies to our walk as Christians. Our walk needs to be separated from the defilement of this world, in order that we may have communion with Christ in glory. It is thus we have a part with Him. “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Rejected and cast out of this world, He was going back to Father. But He did not thereby give up His own which were in the world, but “loved them unto the end.” And in going to the Father, He would have them linked up with Himself in His own blessed relationship with the Father, to have communion with Himself and the Father outside the world which was the scene of His rejection and death. But to have part with Him—communion, with Him—according to that heavenly relationship, it was necessary to have the walk kept pure (the feet washed) according to the truth of this relationship. Thus the blessed Lord has girded Himself for this lowly service of love to His own, in order to keep them in communion with that heavenly scene where He is, forming their affections according to the revelation of Himself to their hearts, as they are being conducted on to their portion with Him in glory.

Do we then fall into sin? Do our feet become defiled in our walk through this evil world? Well, we have an Advocate with the Father, whose plea for us cannot fail, and who also turns to us in blessed grace, with towel and basin, to wash our feet and bring us back into the communion we have lost. By the application of His word to us, we are led to self-judgment, and a walk of holy separation from evil, according to the truth of the cross, in which sin in the flesh has been condemned. May the Lord give us to walk thus, in happy communion with Himself.

Jesus also says: “If I, then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you.” May we also heed this admonition, following His example in the same lowly grace, and in the power of the same divine love.

One thing more. If we have sinned, and the Lord is seeking to wash our defiled feet, or if our brethren are seeking to do so in the Lord’s name, how solemn if we are resisting this action of grace! God is not mocked! He is full of patience, but if we are rebellious, He knows how to chastise and break our stubborn wills. Oh may we trust our feet in the hands of the blessed Lord, to be washed when need arises through our

failure; bowing to His will with repentant hearts and with chastened spirits, and humble, prayerful dependence on God, seek to walk in His fear, and in the realization of His perfect and unfailing love and grace.

A. H. R.

Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule Volume 1, Man's Condition; and What Is the Remedy? Part 1

If it be asked, “What is man’s condition?” the question at once becomes individual and personal, and practically means, “What is my condition?” “What is your condition?” And it is a question affecting not only the temporal, but the eternal well-being of men. It involves the question, “Where shall I spend eternity?” In glory, with God, and Christ, and holy angels, and redeemed men? or in the lake of fire, with Satan, and demons, and wicked men? How important then the question! Let us honestly meet it. What is man’s condition? Is he lost, or only in danger of being lost? Is he under the curse, or only in danger of the curse? Is he dead, or only sick? God’s Word says:

He is lost. Luke 19:10.

He is under the curse. Gal. 3:10.

He is dead. 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 2:1.

How solemn the verdict! Lost! cursed! dead! And what a helpless condition! As helpless as a poor silly sheep, lost on the dark mountains, where wild beasts have their lair, and watch for their prey! As helpless as the condemned criminal in his cell, awaiting the day of execution, when he must yield his life under the curse of the law he has broken! As helpless as Lazarus, dead, and four days in the grave! Oh! what an utterly helpless condition! Reader, is it your condition? It is your condition unless you have believed the gospel, which is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16).

But who can save from such a condition? Can man recover himself from his ruin? The awakened sinner attempts this, only to find it a hopeless task, every effort only serving to increase his misery. Tears and prayers and efforts at repentance will not do. Moral reform, churchgoing and churchgoining will not do. Can the bleating of the sheep, lost on the mountains, save it from the wolf, or the lion, or the bear? Can the pleadings for mercy, and promises of reform, save the criminal just being led to the gallows? Need we write the answer, No? Ah! reader, it is too plain; you know it is impossible.

Is there, then, no help? Is there no remedy? Yes, thank God, there is. God has laid help upon ONE MIGHTY TO SAVE. He has said: “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I HAVE FOUND A RANSOM.” Job 33:24. JESUS is the mighty Savior, and His BLOOD the divine RANSOM.

If the sheep is lost, the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

If the sinner is cursed under a broken law, Christ was made a curse, in order to redeem from the curse of the law.

If the sinner is dead — dead to God as the body in the grave is dead to the world in which it once lived — it is now the hour in which the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and live.

God is now revealed in Christ as a Seeker, a Savior, a Life-giver; and in Him, thus revealed, there is a perfect and divine answer to all man’s need.

Let me ask the unsaved reader, Have you found out your real condition in the sight of God? It is easy to assent to the statement of Scripture, “All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isa. 53:6); but do you realize in your own soul that you are like a stray and lost sheep on the dark mountains, exposed to danger and death every moment? Has God’s truth shone into your soul and revealed this to you? You are not happy. You have been treading the slippery paths of sin, and are far from God, far from Christ, far from home. Have you learned this in your own soul? Have you been groaning under the burden of your guilt? Have you been sighing for rest? Have you been crying to God in your misery? Ah! He has heard you. His ear is not dull of hearing, nor His hand shortened that it cannot save. The good Shepherd has heard the bleating of His sheep, and will not leave it to the mercy of the wolves. “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost” (Luke 15:4-6).

What a picture of the divine compassion for the lost, and of the divine joy over their recovery! The Shepherd seeks until He finds. He lays it on His shoulders, rejoicing. He brings it home, and calls friends and neighbors to rejoice with Him. This is the divine joy. There is joy in heaven — joy in the presence of the angels of God — over one sinner that repenteth.

You are weary of your wandering; you are weary of your sin; you are weary of serving at the swine trough; you are perishing in the far country; in your misery your thoughts turn to the very God you have sinned against; you think of His grace, and you say, I will arise and go to my Father. Blessed moment! a sinner is turning to God, and this will move all heaven to rejoice! The Shepherd has been seeking you; the light from heaven has been shining on you; the lost sheep is found; the Shepherd lays you on His shoulders, rejoicing, and will never put you down until He has brought you safe home!

But perhaps you may say: “I have not only gone astray like a sheep, but I have sinned and am worthy of death. How can I escape the curse of the broken law?” The answer is simple. The One who sought you has also died to redeem you. “It pleased the LORD to bruise Him.” “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). This is the language of faith — what every believing sinner is entitled to say.

Can you put yourself in the company of those who confess their sins? If so, you will find yourself in the company of those whose sins Jesus bore on the accursed tree, the company whom God pardons and saves. David, guilty of adultery and murder, when his sin was brought home to him by the parable of the prophet, said, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Clear and unmistakable was the answer: “The LORD also hath

put away thy sin; thou shalt not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). The prodigal said, “I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:18-19). What was the father’s answer? The command to the servants, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:22-24). Blessed answer to the prodigal’s need!

Can you join company with David, and say, “I have sinned against the LORD”? (2 Sam. 12:13). Then with David also you may hear the words of the prophet, “The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die” (2 Sam. 12:13).

Can you join company with the prodigal, and say, “I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight”? (Luke 15:16). Then robe and ring and royal sandals are yours also.

Can you join company with those who confess, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way”? Then with them also you can add to your confession the peace-giving words, “And the Load hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

Weary and heavy laden — borne down with a sense of guilt — have you heard and responded to the call of Jesus, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”? (Matt. 11:28). Then with the Apostle, and with all who believe the gospel, you can say of Jesus, “Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification,” “who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (Rom. 4:25; 1 Peter 2:24).

Yes, your sins were borne by Jesus; for your offenses He was delivered; for your justification He was raised again. Oh, what peace this brings! “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

But now a question. Who laid your sins on Jesus? Who delivered Him for your offenses? Who raised Him again for your justification? It was GOD — the God of ALL GRACE — the God who is LOVE — the Savior-GOD.

But is there not a hymn which says,

“I lay my sins on Jesus”?

and must not I bring my sins to Jesus, and lay them on Him? Ah! but this is not the gospel; it is not according to the truth. How could you lay your sins on Jesus? They are more than the hairs of your head. How could you ever count them? How remember them — the sins of youth — of the past year — of the past week, perhaps? How many have been forgotten? How many things were sin you never thought of?

“The thought of foolishness is sin,” “idle words.” How many foolish thoughts and idle words have been long forgotten? How then lay them on Jesus?

But where is Jesus now? On the Father’s throne. Can you take your sins up to the Father’s throne, and lay them on Him there? Could He have sins on Him there? Impossible!

What then? You say you believe in Jesus. You may then be assured by the Word of God, that more than 1800 years ago — before your sins were committed — before you were born — God knew all about your sins, laid them all on Jesus, delivered Him up to death for them, and raised Him again for your justification. Where then are your sins? Gone — gone in the blood that was shed for them on the cross — gone forever. Jesus risen is the proof that they are gone, and that you, as a believing sinner, are justified from them all — justified through faith in Jesus. GOD is your JUSTIFIER; who shall condemn? Blessed be God, there is none to answer the challenge. “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

An Aged Apostle's Message, Aged Apostle's Message, An: The Fathers

Many souls are like the prodigal in Luke 15. When he came to himself he had a deep sense of his sinfulness, and he resolved to return and hoped to get a hired servant's place within his father's door. Little did he anticipate the welcome which awaited him. It is so with thousands. They come to themselves; that is, they find out they are good for-nothing sinners, and mercy is the most they hope for. To escape from hell and to get inside the door of heaven is the highest thought they dare to contemplate. Knowing God is merciful, they hope to be spared eternal punishment. Yet such human thoughts fall far short of the grace of God!

When God saves a soul, He does it in a manner worthy of Himself and for His own glory. When He blesses, He does it according to His delight in Christ His Son, and His estimate of the infinite worth of His sacrifice. Grace reigns through righteousness; and it is grace, perfect and free, which awaits all who come to Him.

The heavy-hearted prodigal "arose, and came to his father." Luke 15:20. It is easy to picture his miserable condition, his downcast look, his faltering step, his hesitating manner, as his father's house comes in view. How will he be received? Will he be turned away? Will he be kept waiting outside a closed door, or be ushered into the hired servant's room without even seeing his father's face? The thought of the father's love and grace never entered the repentant prodigal's mind.

But what does the Word say? "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Luke 15:20. The wayward wanderer had never ceased to occupy the heart of that loving father. Love reigned there. And when yet a great way off, his watchful eye discerned the lost one and, filled with compassion, the willing feet sped, and, casting his arms around his neck, the caresses of love told of pardon and peace and reconciliation, even before he had time to confess his sin. The eye saw, the heart was filled with compassion, the feet sped, the arms embraced, and the lips covered with kisses the son who would beg for a servant's place. The father knew him well. Nothing but genuine repentance had broken down that proud heart, and brought him there. The lips of the prodigal only told what that loving father already knew.

How wonderful is the story of grace! This is but a picture of God's welcome to you and me. There is not a single rebuke or reproach, nothing but love for those who return to Him in self-judgment. What a revelation for our souls; God occupied with returning prodigals; God's eye upon us; God's heart yearning over us; God's hastening to welcome us; God's reconciling us then and there with the kisses of peace! God is in all. Little do we realize what Christ and His work are to God. Little do we enter into His thoughts of grace, grace reigning through righteousness, the fruit of that finished redemption work.

The poor prodigal, folded in those arms of love, with the fond kisses of a father's grace upon his cheek, tells out his confession of sin-"I have sinned... and am no more worthy." It was a true and good confession of what he had done and what he was. To be right with God, we must have those two things thoroughly out-I have sinned and I am the sinner. The death of Christ has met both, for at the cross God has judged both my sins and me. Christ took all upon Him there. "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." 1 Pet. 2:24. And God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." 2 Cor. 5:21. And Christ is risen. It is enough. Grace reigns through righteousness. I judge and confess all, and on the ground of Christ's finished work receive all that grace can devise. So it was with this poor wanderer. So it is with everyone who comes back to God.

His thought about being a hired servant-part of his professed confession in the far-off country- never crossed his lips. How could he utter it when folded in a father's fond embrace? No; but when he reached the words "thy son," though owning his unworthiness of that relation, we read, "The father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." Luke 15:22-24. How great were his blessings: the best robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf, the feast, the merriment, the music, and the dancing! In a moment, all was changed. That quiet house becomes at once the scene of joy and festivity. The father, the son, and the whole household (except one) participated in the merrymaking. But first the son must be fitted for that joyful scene.

"Bring forth the best robe," says the commanding voice of the father, "and put it on him." And willing servants hastened to obey. The robe is ready, prepared against that day. It is "the best." An inferior one might have satisfied the prodigal, and far less than what God provides for us might have satisfied you or me. But God blesses.

"Not to suit my thoughts of fitness, But His wondrous thoughts of love."

The righteousness of God is "unto all and upon all them that believe." Rom. 3:22. This is God's best robe, prepared and waiting, as it were, for returning prodigals. It is Christ alone, the righteousness of God, that can fit us for His eye. "Put it on him. " It is "upon all" them that believe. We have nothing to do but to stand still and see the salvation of God and to submit to God's righteousness in simple faith.

The robe is new, perfect, and the best. Nothing short of it will suit the Father's eye and heart and home. In Christ we are complete (Col. 2:10). What a change from the nakedness and filth of the far-off country! Marvel of grace! This is the gospel of God. "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Eph. 1:7.

"And put a ring on his hand." Wondrous favor! May we not learn from this that we are received back forever? The believer is not only in Christ, but sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). We are saved and set in God's eternal favor.

"And shoes on his feet." The reconciled one has to walk henceforth in the presence of his father. He fits him for it. The Christian, clothed with Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit, has to walk before God in communion with Him. It is God's grace that teaches us. It is God's provision that fits us. It is God's power that enables us. And "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." 1 John 2:6.

"And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry." The son being fitted in every way for the position of favor he is henceforth to occupy, the father now commands a feast. He and the son and the servants have their part in the joy. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Luke 15:10. God feasts when a soul is saved, and brings His loved ones into His banqueting house to feast with Him on the riches of His grace in Christ. Blessed communion!

Finally, note well the reason the father gives for the feast. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." Luke 15:24. "This my son." Beloved fellow believer, this is what God says of you. He is our Father. We are His sons. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons [children] of God." 1 John 3:1. We cry, "Abba, Father." Rom. 8:15. We are brought right home to God, and we are at home in His presence. Here we rest, and here we feast. Here we enjoy the blest relationship of sons forever. "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And we were dead. This was our moral state. But now we are alive. We have "passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). We are alive unto God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11; 8:2). Eternal life is ours in the Son (1 John 5:11).

We were lost. But the Savior God found us when we were still far off. We would have been lost forever but for His grace. Through grace we are found forever. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. How blessed to be at home now-at home with God. Believers have left the far-off country forever. By faith and in spirit we enter now where God our Father is. As the well-known hymn puts it-

"In spirit there already, Soon we ourselves shall be."

"And they began to be merry." Beloved reader, have you? The world's merriment is of short duration. Death and judgment are knocking at the door. But once you come to God and receive His grace, then heavenly merriment, spiritual, pure, everlasting, is yours. "They began to be merry." Truly for God and His loved ones it will never cease.

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