

THE LAND OF NOD

MARCH 31, 2019

The younger son, often called the Prodigal, is vampiric in nature. By demanding his share of the inheritance well prior to his father's death, he is as it were sucking the life blood from him. When we are told that in response to his son's demand, the father divide his living, the word for 'living' in the Greek bears this connotation, that is of the giving of one's life blood. Having consumed his father's livelihood, the boy then departs for 'a distant country.' No name is given in the parable, but we can be very confident of its location, for it is that place where we dwell. When exiled from Eden our primeval parents settled to the east thereof. Cain, their eldest, after he murdered his brother, moved apart from his parents, founding the 'land of Nod.'

So it is to Nod that the Prodigal son comes and fittingly so for this first city dwelling of mankind was from the beginning home to rebels, murderers and exiles. The name itself in Hebrew suggests an instable place where one flits and wanders about in agitation. It is a land of trembling for fear is ascendant and scarcity abounds. Upon his arrival, the land experiences a country-wide famine and he is quickly in dire need. How could it be otherwise? In the ancient city of Nod, God is absent and all is in darkness. The Prodigal sinks into slavery and is assigned a place with the swine, a fact which again emphasizes the godforsaken nature of this distant country. Before even putting down roots, the living taken from his father has been squandered and the boy dissipated and near death.

In the story the younger sibling is masterfully portrayed as living in a pitiable manner. At this lowest of ebbs we then hear that he ‘comes to his senses’ and starts for his father’s house. The father, eager for his son’s return, rushes forth to embrace him and much is discerned thereby of Christian mercy and forgiveness, the very heart of the parable. Yet we should not gloss over the easily overlooked phrase ‘coming to his senses’ upon which everything which follows depends.

Leaving Nod is anything but easy and we can never hope to do so unless we too can regain a proper vision of reality. This is harder than it sounds, for in Nod just about everyone is asleep though few know it. To us who dwell here, up is down and down is up; that which is false is deemed true and the truth is avoided at all costs due to its power to awaken and reveal to us the falseness of much we hold dear. Where evil rules, that which is false is sought, defended and rewarded. By contrast, seekers of the good and true are strung up on crosses.

Thankfully, due to the very mercy of God as revealed in this magisterial parable, a light now shines in the distant country, however dimly. It is the light of He who condescended to live and die there among his lost brethren. To seek out this light, this person, and to bask in his glory is to court truth and to turn the soul towards its true home. It is to regain one’s senses and to rush headlong into the Father’s loving embrace.