

THE PRODIGAL RECEIVED.

– APRIL 19. – Luke 15:11-32. –

Golden Text – "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." – Luke 15:10.

HIS parable, as also the two preceding ones concerning the joy in finding the lost sheep and the precious bit of silver, was spoken by way of reproof to the murmuring of the Pharisees and scribes against our Lord's gracious attitude toward the publicans and sinners who in great multitudes assembled to hear him. Their complaint was, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." – Vs. 2.

The parable recognizes two classes in the Jewish nation, – one represented by the "elder son," who had carefully and wisely preserved their portion of the inheritance granted them, and the other a prodigal class who had wasted their portion in riotous living. The former class were the Pharisees, and all who had respect unto their inheritance in the Law Covenant, which was the portion granted to all Israel by the Heavenly Father; while the latter class were such as recklessly plunged into open sin, regardless of all their interests in the inheritance granted to them. But, as a matter of fact, while the one had preserved and the other had wasted his inheritance, neither class had rightly valued or comprehended all that was implied in their share of the inheritance of Israel, and while the one had grievously sinned, neither was the other without sin; and the sin of both hindered the operation of the Law Covenant for their blessing. And so that which was ordained to life was found to be unto death. – Rom. 7:10.

Seeing the helpless condition of all, which neither of these classes realized, God, in his abounding mercy, sent to them the Messenger of a New Covenant, which would indeed be unto life to all who should comply with its righteous conditions. (Gal. 3:21,22; Acts 3:26.) Now

while the "elder son" class was really in the most favorable position to receive the blessings of the new covenant in Christ, being schooled in the law and the prophets, all of which testified of Christ in type and prophecy, as a matter of fact, as Jesus said (Matt. 21:31,32), the publicans and harlots were going into the Kingdom blessings and privileges before them. And why? Simply because this "elder son" class had cultivated a spirit of pride and boastfulness, feeling that they had done a very meritorious thing in simply retaining their respect for the law and refraining from riotous living, whereas in this they had done nothing more than their duty, and that they had done very imperfectly. They had actually become so vain and puffed up in their self-righteous conceit that they were thereby blinded to their need of any new covenant of life, and they became foolishly confident of receiving eternal life as a recompense for their imperfect, outward keeping of the law.

The publicans and sinners, on the other hand, seeing nothing whatever in themselves to boast of, saw no hope for themselves in the provisions of God's perfect law, which [R1958 : page 72] they had openly and grossly violated; and being despised by and cast out from the more law-abiding "elder brother" class, they were ready to appreciate the condescending love and kindness of the Lord, the great Teacher and Prophet in Israel, and to profit by his instructions. The hearts of many of this "prodigal" class were won by the meek and loving zeal of the Lord for their recovery from the bondage of sin and their reestablishment in the favor of God.

Had the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees been right, had they really been actuated by the spirit of the divine law, even though they could not fulfil its letter, they would have rejoiced in the return of the prodigal publicans and sinners from the paths of sin to the paths of righteousness. But, actuated by a spirit of proud self-righteousness, they scorned the returning prodigal and arrayed themselves in opposition to the Lord, the Heavenly Father's representative, who graciously welcomed them and taught them and companied with them

and blessed them. This loving, helpful spirit is the spirit which the Lord would have all his people exercise toward even the most degraded of men who manifest any disposition to forsake sin and return to the right ways of the Lord. In our Father's name, he would have us meet them, even while they are yet a long way off, and encourage their return with assurances of a hearty welcome and a blessed feast. He would have us bring hither the best robe, – the robe of Christ's imputed righteousness, that, thus clothed, they may receive the unending divine favor of which the ring was a symbol, and the seal of the Father's love of which the kiss was a token.

This is the spirit manifested also among all the holy angels: – "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."
