

## **"BRING FORTH THE BEST ROBE AND PUT IT ON HIM."**

– LUKE 15:11-24. – MAY 15. –

**Golden Text:** "Come and let us return unto the Lord." – Hosea 6:1.

OUR Lord gave three parables illustrative of God's grace: (1) The parable of the hundred sheep, of which one was lost and carefully sought. (2) The parable of the ten pieces of silver, of which one was lost and carefully sought. (3) The parable of the two sons, the lost one of whom was so eagerly welcomed back on his return.

The Pharisees "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others." They had forms of righteousness, ceremonies, outward obedience to God and his laws, and reverence, piety and sanctity in outward appearance. We may assume that with some these matters were genuine – of the heart and not merely of formality; but the evidences are strong that there were few of this professed "holiness people" who were really at heart holy, as judged by the Lord's standard. The harvesting of the Jewish age surely found all of the true wheat, all the truly holy; and, so far as we have knowledge on the subject, comparatively few of these were found amongst those who outwardly made the profession of special sanctity – the Pharisees.

### **PUBLICANS AND SINNERS.**

There was a measure of truth in the assertion of the Pharisees that the majority of people were living in sin, neglecting the divine Law, and thus living much after the manner of the Gentiles, who were without God and had no hope in the world. But our Lord wished them to see that they took a wrong attitude in the matter. Instead of holding aloof from their fellow Jews, their brethren, they should have been deeply interested in them and ready to do anything in their

power to help them back to harmony with God and fellowship with themselves. Instead, the Pharisaical class rather delighted to proclaim that they were the heirs of God's favor and that the others were estranged from God. These estranged ones were called publicans and sinners. The sinners were the more or less immoral, who made no professions of keeping the Mosaic Law, observances of the more sacred rites and ceremonies, holy days, etc. True, they took part in some of the festivals, but largely from the standpoint of the merchant and trader and sightseer rather than from the standpoint of worship offerer. The publicans were Jews who had become somewhat estranged to their laws and to the patriotic sentiments of the nation, and who accepted service under the Romans as tax-gatherers. They were looked down upon by those who held that the seed of Abraham, heirs of the great Oath bound Covenant, should never, in any sense of the word, become the servants of a foreign master, and particularly should not serve the foreign master in collecting taxes from his brothers; for they held that it was not proper that they should pay taxes to Caesar's government.

Our Lord, though attentive to all of the duties of the Jew under the Law, was out of touch with such Pharisaism, and instead of holding himself aloof from the publicans and sinners, "the common people," he preached his message to everyone who had ears to hear, making no distinction as between scribe and Pharisee, publican and sinner. For this the Pharisees scorned him, considering that thus he acknowledged himself and his teachings to be on a lower plane – more closely allied with the common people, the sinner class. The three parables already referred to were spoken particularly as a reproof to the Pharisees – to show them the impropriety of their attitude toward the masses, "the common people."

Our Lord did not deny that the publicans and sinners were in the wrong, were in some respects further estranged from God than the Pharisees; but he wished the latter to see that their hearts were not in accord with the mind of the Lord, else they would not feel so

indifferent toward their brethren. The three parables were lessons drawn from the common affairs of life – which man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one would not go after it? or which woman of you having a bracelet with ten pieces of silver ornaments, prized as a marriage memento, would not search diligently if one of these pieces were lost? and if so, why should they not consider a brother of much more value than the sheep or a coin, and why not seek for the brother and endeavor to bring him back again? As capping the climax came the parable of the prodigal son, which constitutes our present lesson. It represents our heavenly Father and his attitude toward the two classes. The elder son represented the Pharisees; the younger man, the prodigal, represented the publicans and sinners; the father represented God. The parable showed God's willingness to receive back again the penitent one, and forcefully represented the impropriety, the inconsistency, of the Pharisees in objecting to the recovery of their brothers from the ways of sin and their return to the family of God.

### **THE YOUNGER SON OF THE PARABLE.**

The wrong course of the publicans and sinners is graphically illustrated: they had been in God's favor under the Mosaic Covenant, but feeling released from the restraints of home, the restraints of the Law of Moses, [R3360 : page 136] they had wandered from God into the ways of sin and suffering, looking for pleasures and prosperity in the wrong direction. They should have been glad to remain under divine protection and care and to have enjoyed the Father's house and all of its blessings. They should have realized the blessed privilege they enjoyed of being separated by the Lord from the world in general; but they did not appreciate this, and had gone off into sin, and, though really Israelites, had been living after the manner of the Gentiles, and worse than some of them. They had been serving Satan, and many of their sicknesses were the result, as well as much of their destitution and especially their moral degradation. God's covenant with them as Jews was that, if obedient to his

arrangements, they should have temporal prosperity. In this particular their position was the reverse of ours, to whom the Lord promises temporal adversity and spiritual prosperity under the Gospel dispensation.

Satan may be said to be master of this far country – afar from God and his love and protection and care. He it was who degraded them to the level of swine, and in his service they starve for any satisfying portion. The swine in the parable represented the worldly, those engrossed in the things of the present time and wholly indifferent to spiritual matters, and this prodigal is represented as having nothing more for his sustenance than have the worldly; yet there was a difference between him and the swine, for while the swine could fill their bellies and grow fat on the bean pods of the locust or carob tree, the prodigal found it hard to subsist on that diet. He realized his degradation. "He came to himself," he realized that he had been insane, stupid, dreaming, when he left so gracious a father's house and so great blessings as he had once enjoyed and come down to this degraded position, where his whole being hungered and thirsted for the blessings of the home he had left. The first thing he did was to resolve to will, and then he proceeded to do. The willing would have amounted to nothing had it not been followed by the doing, but the doing could not have preceded the willing.

The picture drawn by the Lord of the beggared and tattered prodigal, with a look of shame and fearful forebodings of what reception he might have from his father and from his brother, is graphically set forth in the Lord's parable. His elder brother, represented by the Pharisees, was not on the lookout for him; but the father, representing God, saw him a long way off – was looking for him, was compassionate toward him, and, lest he should be discouraged in his fearfulness, the father ran to meet him, to welcome him. His reception was as though he had never sinned: the best robe, the shoes, the ring, all were his, and the feast proclaimed the father's

joy to the entire household. This is given by our Lord to show the Pharisees how God viewed the returning of these publicans and sinners who were hearing the Gospel message and coming back to lives of righteousness and harmony with God.

### **SCRIBES AND PHARISEES THE ELDER SON.**

The majority of our Lord's followers were of this class, and the Pharisees, instead of hating the Lord and hating the message which was attracting these former wanderers back to love and service and hope and of fellowship with God, should have been glad. Then, picturing the Pharisees and their attitude in the matter, the Lord showed them that they were angry with the Father because of his goodness, and were refusing to go into the feast to which they were made welcome by the Father, and which they should have enjoyed with these returning prodigals. The loss would be theirs, the gain would be that of the more humble minded. The Father, who was pleased to give them his blessings in every way and pleased to continue with them, would not force them to have his favors, even though by nature they were his chosen ones. If they would not come in to share the Father's hospitalities with the returned prodigal they could not share them at all. The Gospel feast is but one feast, and all who participate in it must come in under the Father's terms and arrangements.

While the parable is thus seen to be, strictly speaking, a Jewish parable which in none of its features includes the Gentiles, we may nevertheless draw from it an illustrative application to our day. As we have frequently noted, fleshly Israel was a type or foreshadowing of spiritual Israel, and the harvest of the Jewish age a pattern of foreview of the harvest of this Gospel age. In a broad sense of the word the whole world may be viewed in the light of this parable. Those who have sought to remain in harmony with the heavenly Father – those who have striven to walk in holiness of life and in obedience to the divine will – may be considered the elder brother;

while the younger brother represents those described **[R3361 : page 136]** by the Apostle in Romans, first chapter, "Who when they knew God glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God," etc. "Wherefore God gave them up to uncleanness, to the lusts of their own hearts," etc. "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections ...and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness," etc.

From this standpoint nearly the whole world of mankind is still in a far country, in the land of the enemy, under the blinding influences of the god of this world. And now by the grace of God we learn in advance that ultimately an opportunity is to be given to all of these everywhere to come to themselves, to realize what they have lost, and come to realize the Father's willingness to receive them back again – an opportunity for reformation during the Millennial age under the ministry of him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. To those **[R3361 : page 137]** who are in the right attitude of heart this message gives joy and rejoicing, while to another class today the very thought of the estranged world being granted an opportunity for returning to the heavenly Father and to have the robe of Christ's righteousness placed upon them, and to be accepted to sonship to God again, is a repulsive thought, just as the thought of the favor of God going to the publicans and sinners was repulsive to most of the Pharisees of our Lord's time.

The first returning prodigal under the new dispensation will be the poor Jew – for thus it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant with them when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the Gospel they are enemies for your sake; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the

gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Rom. 11:25-30.) The Prophet describes the experiences of the Jew as a prodigal returning to the Father's house, saying, that the Lord will pour upon them the spirit of prayer and of supplication, and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced and shall mourn because of him. Neither will they be the only ones upon whom the Father will pour his Spirit, as it is written, "After those days [after the Gospel age, the time of dealing with the servants and handmaidens only] the Lord shall pour out his Spirit upon all flesh." – Joel 2:28,29.

### **MANKIND IN GENERAL PRODIGALS.**

The same thought is brought to our attention in Nebuchadnezzar, who in a general way represents the madness upon the world. At the end of the days – at the end of his period of bestial degradation – he came to himself, and we read, "At the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High and I praised and honored him that liveth forever...my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and brightness returned unto me." (Dan. 4:33.) So at the end of the Gentile times, after 1915, reason will begin to come back to the prodigal ones, and the light of the Lord Jesus will begin to shine in every quarter, and a blessing will come to the whole human family released from the blinding influences of the Adversary. The Prophet again describes this coming blessing to the whole world saying, "At that time many nations shall go and say, Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord's house; he shall teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for then the law shall go forth from Mount Zion [the spiritual Kingdom, the glorified Christ] and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem [earthly representatives of the Millennial Kingdom and glory]."

## **"THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER."**

It is remarkable how some people can see a little yet are unable to grasp the glorious vision of divine wisdom and power. For instance, Rev. Alex. McKenzie, writing along the lines of divine compassion and the open door for those who will return to the Father's house, couches his thought in the following words:

"It would not be amiss to say that the Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of the second chance. Men have curiously wondered if there was a second chance in another world. There is something much better than that, a second chance in this world. 'Now,' cries the great Archer, 'now is the accepted time to try again! Now is the day to hit the mark.' Repentance is a new opportunity. So the prodigal came back to his father, saying, 'Father, before heaven and in thy sight I have missed the mark. Let me be as one of thy servants to make bows and arrows for better men.' But his father understood the confession. 'Bring out a new bow and give it to him.' The brother said, 'But, father, he has had his bow and missed the mark.' 'Bring out the best bow and give it to him. My boy has come back to try again.'"

We are glad that our heavenly Father gives us and our brothers and sisters and children opportunities to recover themselves after they have wandered into sin – opportunities to profit by the lessons of life and the sad experience of being strangers, aliens from God. It is well for us that we can see this. Fortunate it is that so few have gotten the thought that one failure, one mistake, would seal their destiny. Glad we are that so many are able to realize the divine compassion and forgiveness manifested through Jesus, which makes allowances not only for our original estrangement but for various missteps subsequently. But shall we limit the grace of this God when he himself has expressed no limits? Shall we say that it is only to those who have heard his voice and come into his family in the present time that his grace shall be extended at all? Why is it that so many find it difficult to realize that the same God who has had



compassion on their weaknesses and failures and has accepted them back as prodigals, without any violation of justice, may not be equally generous toward those who as yet have not even had an ear to hear or the eyes to see his grace and goodness in Christ?

It is passing strange that now, in the dawning of the new dispensation, as the Lord brings to our attention the glorious features of his plan, which shall surely make for the uplift of the world of mankind and their complete restitution if they are willing, back to all that was lost in Eden – purchased for them by the Father through the gift of his Son at Calvary – these blessings should arouse the opposition and anger of any who have ever named the name of Christ, or have ever been made in any measure partakers of the Father's spirit. How is it that such close their ears to the message respecting our dear Redeemer – "This is the true light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world"? How is it that they refuse to give credence to the message which the Lord sent by the angel choir on the plains of Bethlehem – "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people"?

### **NONE BUT REPENTANT PRODIGALS RECEIVED.**

In the parable there was joy at the return of the **[R3361 : page 138]** prodigal from the fields of sin and disloyalty, and this was explained by the Lord to mean that there is joy in heaven over the return of every one who, after being a child of God, has wandered from the Father's house. The same principle now holds true in this Gospel age, and any who, having been accepted in Christ, shall wander away and return again in true humility, as represented in the parable, may again experience God's favor and have their past forgiven, and the robe of Christ's righteousness shall cover their blemishes. They shall have the evidences of divine favor and mercy again. We can see that God's heart is large enough to have made a provision for the world of mankind through the same Redeemer and through the same precious atonement sacrifice; and not only do we

rejoice to see this unfolding of the larger features of the divine plan, but we are sure that the angels in heaven likewise rejoice to see the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God as exhibited toward his fallen creatures.

Nothing in the above is meant to intimate in any sense of the word that any will be received of God at any time on any other terms than are represented in this parable, in the case of the prodigal. The prodigal must will to return, the prodigal must strive to return, but the Father will meet him on the way to encourage him, to receive him, to bless him, to bring him into all the glorious things which he has in reservation for those who love him and his righteousness. There is a part, however, in all such reformation which belongs in some measure to divine providence – it is that represented by the words, "When he came to himself." Sin and degradation have brought unreason, unbalanced judgment, and have made the good to appear bad, the light to appear darkness, the true to appear false, and contrariwise. It is of divine providence that the eyes of our understanding open to see just where we are, and to realize our need and our loss. And so, as we have shown above, divine promises reach out for the world of mankind and attest to us that in due time God will cause reason to come to mankind that they may appreciate their lessons and desire to return to the Father's house. The will and the effort, however, they must exercise, else the results will not be attained. All through the Millennial age mankind will be brought to a discernment of their needs, and as they respond they will have the Father's provision in Christ for meeting them on the way and helping them back through the provisions of restitution to a condition that will be full of peace and blessing in accord with the Almighty.

The eye of some prodigal may rest upon this article, and he may feel a longing for the Father's house, **[R3362 : page 138]** the family association and the gracious blessings and spiritual fellowship which belong there and which he in the past enjoyed and has left. If so, we remind him that this thought is the beginning of the return to reason

– he is coming to himself. Let him arise immediately and go unto the Father through the appointed way, the Lord Jesus; let him be assured of the Father's willingness to receive him; but let him not return in any self-righteous or self-excusing attitude of mind, which would be sure to frustrate the blessing hoped for. He must go back as did the prodigal, with contrition of heart, with full confession of his error, and with a willingness to take the very lowest place in the Father's family as a servant. It is to such that the Father is pleased to give a full restoration of the privileges of sonship.

