

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Lesson 6.—May S.

Luke 15: 11-24.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

GOLDEN TEXT.

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.—Luke 15: 18.

TOPIC.—A Lesson of Repentance.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Luke 15: 24. Tuesday, Gen. 3: 1-13. Wednesday, 1 Tim. 6: 6-12. Thursday, Exod. 16: 10. Friday, Psa. 143: 1-12. Saturday, 1 Thess. 4: 7-18.

NOTES BY A. C. KENDRICK, D.D., L.L.D.

This parable illustrates, by a longer and more touching narrative, the same thought as the two preceding; that thought is a simple and obvious one; it is the divine compassion toward the sinful and lost. In the former ones the shepherd forgot for the moment his unstrayed and unperilous sheep in his anxious concern for one that had wandered. The woman forgot for the moment the nine drachmas in her eagerness to find the lost drachma. And as both rejoiced with a demonstrative joy, over the finding of the lost, such as was not felt forth by those that had not been lost, and had created no anxiety; here the father hastens to welcome his repentant and returning prodigal, and to make over him demonstrations of rejoicing which he had never made, and had had no occasion to make, for the son who had continued in his unrepentant and unrepentant obedience.

The ninety-nine sheep that had not strayed, the nine drachmas that had not been lost, the son that had never left his father's roof and service, nor disobeyed his commands, all are never to each other. They are not self-righteous, nor the legally, but imperfectly, righteous of the Jewish nation. They are the genuine, truly, perfectly righteous,—providing such there be,—supposed by the Saviour as a background against which to set the divine compassion towards sinners. If the Pharisees, who armor against the Lord for his condescending grace toward sinners, are really the righteous persons whom they must recognize with thankfulness, instead of complaint, as a feature in God's government, that shows mercy to the unworthy, that sent Jesus to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. If they are not the righteous, but sinners to repentance, the point here illustrated is that compassionate love which seeks and saves the unworthy, and welcomes the return of the prodigal with more lavish demonstrations of joy than had been called forth by long-continued and faithful obedience. The transient murmuring of the elder and faithful son is, as a feature of the parable, true to life, and is felicitously introduced in order to give the father an opportunity of bringing out with more fullness and force the occasion of rejoicing furnished by the return of the prodigal.

Vs. 11-13.—We have the father with his two sons. The younger, as we experienced, and more open to temptation, requests his share of the paternal goods, that he may go forth on a larger license from home restraints under which he had, perhaps, become restive. We need assume no deliberately sinful purpose, nor need we speculate why the father accedes to the request and divides his property. The division is necessary for the purposes of the parable. Not many days after. A feature giving verisimilitude to the story. Gathered all together. Naturally by turning his property into money. The narrator does not stop to consider how this was regarded by the father and the elder brother. The younger brother goes it, and goes abroad, and yields to the temptation of wasting—scattering, dissipating—his property in riotous living; literally, by living riotously, riotously.

Vs. 14.—Having expended all in riotous and profligate living. There came a violent famine. The famine was no casual connection with the young man's dissipation. The two came simultaneously; the famine came on just as his resources were exhausted. In the spiritual sphere—where the parable has its application—the worldly expenditure and the spiritual destitution are allied as cause and consequence. He himself. Even so lately revelling in abundance, and the common destitution.

Vs. 15, 16.—He went and joined himself. These details are added to portray vividly the extremities to which he was reduced. He became dependant on a stranger, was reduced to the employment of a hired hand. A business peculiarly degrading to a Jew (as the young man

is naturally supposed to be), to whom swine is an abhorrence, and even there is refused the food given to these loathsome animals. Karobods. A sort of a coarse bean used in the East for fattening cattle. None gave to him. A stroke added to mark his utter destitution.

Vs. 17-19.—Hunger and abandonment work their natural effects. He comes to himself: returns to his senses; sees the folly of his course of improvident licentiousness. He contrasts his utter destitution with the abundance enjoyed even by the hirelings of his father. They superabound in bread, while he perishes here with hunger. I will arise. With dramatic vividness the whole scene passes before our eyes. We see it enacted in the bosom of the young man before it discloses itself in outward action. I have sinned against heaven and before thee. Of course, this is in the parable is not necessarily Christian repentance. It is the free, broad, full confession of a son thoroughly convinced of his unfilial and foolish conduct, and ready to make the amplest acknowledgment. In every relation, alike toward God and his father, his sin has been grievous and inexcusable. Am no longer worthy. He dares not hope for the restored filial relation; the utmost he aspires to is to be placed on the level of those hired laborers who receive at his father's liberal hands ample supply of all their needs.

Vs. 20.—His purpose is instantly fulfilled; he arose and came to his father. While he was yet far distant his father saw him. Whether waiting for him in the house, or having gone forth in the hope of meeting him, his eye of waiting and watchful love saw him; he recognized him in his rags and wretchedness, and was moved with compassion. He did not wait for the son to come up and fall at his feet; with active compassion he ran and fell on his neck and affectionately (such is the force of the original verb) kissed him.

Vs. 21.—The son commenced his premeditated appeal, Father, I have sinned, etc. The father would have anticipated the whole of it; he only succeeded in cutting short the closing request, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." Before the son could utter this, the impatient heart of the father issued the mandate to his servants.

Vs. 22.—The best robe, the ring, the shoes. First the outward garb of the returned prodigal is to be cared for. His wretched apparel is to be exchanged for the garments and decorations of a son whom the father delighted to honor.

Vs. 23.—The fattest calf: A fattening kept as was often the case, for festive occasions. Along with sumptuous apparel, sumptuous food. Let us eat and make merry: Rejoice, or delight ourselves. This answers to the calling together of the friends and neighbors of the preceding parables. The return of the prodigal, the recovery of the lost one, must be the signal for public rejoicing and festivities.

Vs. 24.—Was dead. In the sphere of the parable the reference is not to spiritual death. The son was dead to his father; he had abandoned him, gone off, and been reckoned and mourned by him as among the dead; his recovery had been hailed as a return to life. It was as if a dead son had risen from the grave. In the application of the parable it is spiritual death and spiritual resurrection; the restoring of the dead and lost soul to life and to God.

Vs. 25-32.—The parable is here essentially completed. But the scene of the elder son adds greatly to its force and formal completeness. We have him in the analogue of the "righteous" person who needs no repentance;—not a sham righteous person; not a conceited Pharisee; but a son who had for many years served his father, had never transgressed his commandments, and was lovingly recognized by the father as one who was always with him, "and all that I have is thine." This son's natural misunderstanding and murmuring over the father's joy is made the occasion of a final and most beautiful reiteration and enforcement of the great principle of all these parables,—pre-eminence joy over the recovery of the lost. The father constantly rejoiced over the obedient son; special demonstrations are fittingly reserved for those who have been in imminent peril, and snatched from destruction.

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