

The Prodigal Son.

MAY 8th.

LUKE IV : 11-24.

Golden Text, Luke 15 : 18.

IN this incomparable parable God is represented as the Father of all mankind, rich in mercy to all who call upon Him. In last lesson the Saviour is represented as seeking sinners. In this, is seen the sinner seeking the Saviour, and the successive steps by which he is brought to repentance. The two sons stand for the two classes to whom Jesus spoke—the publicans and the pharisees. Both are selfish. In the one case the result is discontentment, alienation from parental love, moral degradation ; in the other, ingratitude, envy, and jealousy. The drift of the parable is to shew the natural depravity of the human heart, and that the grace of God extends to sinners of every degree. V. 12 *Give me the portion*—one-third of the estate would fall to the younger, two-thirds to the elder on the death of the father. But he must have it now. He fancies he can manage it better. How many young men has this fancy ruined ! The father gives him what he asks in order that he may learn his folly. Vs. 13, 14. *A far country*—independence of God is soon followed by departure from God. *The world* is the far country in which the ungodly vainly seek happiness in the pleasures of sin. *Wasted*—squandered his money, lost his self-respect. *Began to be in want*—The sinner must first be emptied of self before he can receive Christ. V. 15, 16. *Joined himself*—in despair hired himself as a slave, John 8 : 34. *To feed swine*—To a Jew this would be a striking image of the inconceivable wretchedness into which sin drags a man down—for the hog was held in utter abomination, Lev. 11 : 7-8. *The hucks*—the pods of the locust-tree, or carob, swine's food, though eaten also by the poorest classes. Contrast this with the dainties of his fathers "sumptuous" board. Many, like this prodigal, hanker for that which fills, but does not satisfy, Isa. 55 : 2. V. 17 : 18. *Came to himself*—he regains his reason, Dan. 4 : 34-37 ; has thoughts about *Home*. *I will arise*—The change has come at last ; he is convinced of his folly ; he will confess his sin, to his father. This will every penitent do. V. 20. *He arose and came*—trusting in his father's love. That is *conversion*—when the sinner turns from his evil ways and seeks God. What a picture is here of God's willingness to be reconciled to sinners ! 2 Pet. 3 : 9. Ephes. 2 : 13-17. Vs. 21, 22. *I have sinned*—Ps. 51 : 4. Luke 18 : 13. More he would have said but father says,—"it is enough," though not *worthy* to be called my son thou art received as such. *The best robe*—in token of restoration to son-ship ; *ring and shoes*, to shew that he is a free man again. V. 24. *Was dead*—sin is moral death, Ephes. 2 : 1. Salvation is moral resurrection, Ephes. 5 : 14. To live away from God is to be lost to all good influences. The lesson is incomplete without reference to the churlish conduct of the elder brother—The contrast teaching us that God regards with unspeakably greater favour sincere penitence than self-righteous formality.

The Rich Man and Lazarus.

MAY 15th.

LUKE XVI : 19-31.

Golden Text : Prov. 14 : 32.

THE PARABLE of the unjust steward in the beginning of this chapter, addressed to the publicans who seemed to have believed on Jesus, contained a rebuke against unfaithfulness—to which their calling peculiarly exposed them. This, spoken to the Pharisees, who derided his teaching, shews them the terrible danger of their besetting sin—*Covetousness*. V. 19. *A certain rich man*—a representative of their own class. *Clothed in purple*—the raiment of princes, which only wealth can buy, is described in striking contrast to the mean rags of a certain beggar. *Fared sumptuously*—expensively : had every thing that heart could wish for. *Lazarus*, or "Eliazar, whom God help." *Was laid*—as many other objects of charity were, at the portals of the rich. Here he lay helpless, day after day, a silent reproach to the niggardliness of the grandee. *Desiring to be fed*—The inference from the sequel is that he got very few "crumbs" and no compassion. Even the dogs who licked his sores had more the appearance of kindness than Dives, though their unclean tongues would intensify the sufferings of Lazarus. V. 22. Both died, Eccles. 9 : 2, 3. Heb. 9 : 27. Each went to his own place in Hades, Acts 1 : 25, where the contrast in their conditions is still greater than upon earth. Their positions are quite reversed. *Abraham's bosom*—paradise, Matt. 8 : 11 : Luke 23 : 43. Dives was buried as gorgeously as he had lived ; Lazarus' funeral was too mean to be mentioned. V. 23. *In Hell*—the place of departed spirits. *Lifted up his eyes*—as from the lowest depths of the pit. *Seeth Abraham and Lazarus*. To see the beggar there aggravated his misery, Ch. 13 : 28. V. 24. *Father Abraham*—unavailing appeal to ancestral relationship ! ch. 3 : 8. John 8 : 39. *Have mercy on me*—He that had no mercy on Lazarus now begs for mercy, James 2 : 13. *Cool my tongue*—He does not ask to be taken thence. He utterly dispairs of that ; besides, heaven would be a hell to him ; he could not enjoy it. *A drop of water*—the smallest alleviation of the dreadful torment is all he asks for. He had sinned with his tongue, in his tongue he is tormented, James 3 : 6-10. V. 25. *Son*—a stinging acknowledgement of the claimed relationship, v. 24. *Remember*—memory does not die. *Thy good things*—what you counted good, you got, and so have had your reward, Matt. 6 : 2. By the same Law Lazarus now enjoys his reward. The seeming paradox of the afflictions of the righteous is thus explained in the readjustment that takes place after death. V. 26. *A great gulph fixed*. Restorationism and annihilationism are pronounced equally fallacious, Eccles. 9 : 5 and 11 : 3 ; Matt. 25 : 46. V. 27-31. *Send him*, &c.—a virtual reproach against God, as much as to say that he himself had not been sufficiently warned, but Abraham reminds him that both he and his friends had sinned against light and privilege, John 5 : 43-47. Acts 15 : 21. One Lazarus did rise from the dead, yet the witnesses of his resurrection did not repent, John 12 : 10-11.