

## DOCTRINE TO BE PROVED.

Christ is the bread of life. John vi. 48, &c.

## THIRD SABBATH.

SUBJECT: *The prodigal son.* Luke xv. 11-32.

The object of this parable is to show how willing God is to receive even wilful and notorious sinners, and how their conversion redounds to his glory.

V. 11.—The two sons represent, the elder, the scribes and pharisees; and the younger, the "publicans and sinners." The cold, faithless man of correct external morals is the elder son; the wilful, reckless libertine is the younger.

V. 12.—In the east sons can lawfully claim their share of the inheritance during their father's life. But all the property which the father secures after this first division is his own, and he may do with it as he sees fit. This explains several points in the parable.

V. 13.—He took the readiest way to ruin his soul and body and estate, and to debase himself utterly. *A far country*—how very far off do sinners go from God!

V. 14.—Waste ever ends in want: the end of the feast of the wicked is "a mighty famine."

V. 15.—To feed swine is the most debasing employment to which in the east a man could be put. He became an utter outcast from society.

V. 16.—*Husks*—a pod somewhat like a bean pod. Poor people still live on it in seasons of sore famine. It grows on the carob tree.

V. 17.—"Came to himself:" he had been morally insane. He longed for his father's house. Before leaving home it seemed drudgery to be a son; now it were freedom to be as "a hired servant."

Vv. 18, 19.—He has a true sense of his forlorn condition, and he forms a rightful resolve. Confession always becomes a sinner. He at once *executes his good resolutions*.

V. 20.—His father anticipates his coming and welcomes him with every demonstration of love.

V. 21.—He even cuts short his son's apology and confession with assurances of pardon and favour. He does not give the penitent time to say "make me as one of my hired servants."

V. 22.—The "best robe" was kept for birthdays and holidays. The "ring" was a sign of favour and authority.

V. 23.—It is customary in the east to fatten a calf for special occasions.

Vv. 24-29.—The elder son, like the pharisees, was angry at the welcome accorded to the penitent. He sulked, and could see no reason for the gladness around him.

V. 30.—"This thy son"—literally *this son of thine*. He spoke with contempt of him, as if he were not his brother: just as the Jews did of the "publicans and sinners."

Vv. 31, 32.—His father replies gently and reminds him of his relationship, by saying, "*this brother of thine*."

## LESSONS.

This most affecting and beautiful parable teaches us many lessons and doctrines.

1. The conduct of the prodigal illustrates the downward course of sin. He sank at last till he was flung out of the very brothels where he had wasted his living, and compelled to eat with swine. How often do drunkenness and debauchery lead to ruin among ourselves!

2. His recovery shows what true conversion is. The sinner "comes to himself." He remembers God. He has a true apprehension of his sins, and a sense of the mercy of God in Christ. He feels his utter unworthiness. He at once goes to God with his sins, and his wants and misery.

3. In the conduct of the father we have an illustration of God's treatment of returning sinners, how cordially he welcomes them, and overwhelms them with blessings.

4. Let the conduct of the elder brother warn us against a selfish trust in ourselves and distrust of God. He was a "legalist." He is jealous, cold and cruel.

5. All through the parable we find sin represented as the cause of ruin and death; and God's love is the only cure. Salvation is all of divine mercy.

## DOCTRINE TO BE PROVED.

God is willing to receive the repenting sinner. Matt. xi. 28-30; 1 Tim. i. 15, 16, &c.

## FOURTH SABBATH.

SUBJECT: *Healing of the Syro-Phœnician woman's daughter.* Matt. xv. 21-28.

This miracle is related by Mark in chap. vii. 24-30. Tyre and Sidon were near each other, and hence the constant union of the names. They were in Phœnicia, to the north-west of Palestine, about a hundred miles from Jerusalem. The woman was a Canaanite by nation, but a Syro-Phœnician by residence.

V. 22.—*Have mercy*—a prayer which is appropriate to the lips of every sinner. *Son of David*, was a mark of the true Messiah.

V. 23.—He tried her faith severely, but she continued her prayer. "*Send her away*"—the disciples probably meant, satisfy her, give her request that she may go away. Jesus never sent one away empty.

V. 24.—His mission was *first* to the Jews. Among them he is to preach and perform miracles. But he is the Saviour of all, Gentile as well as Jew.