

The Sabbath School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

THE GOSPEL FEAST.

October 13] A. D. 33. [Luke xv: 15-24.

GOLDEN TEXT:—*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.*—Verse 15.

The Lord is at table in the house of a chief Pharisee, on the Sabbath day. He has already spoken a parable against the unseemly self-exaltation of the guests; and has addressed a word to the host regarding the guests who especially should be invited to such a feast. One who "sat at meat with Him" breaks out into the exclamation—"blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God"; with reference, it has been supposed, to the Jewish notion that the Kingdom of God should be ushered in by a great and glorious festival. He probably thinks of that kingdom which the Lord was prophesying, in the literal way common with his class; or is himself complacently visited with any doubt as to himself sharing in it. Some imagine that by a seemingly pious remark he wishes to deliver the host from the embarrassment of our Lord's direct address to him. The Lord in reply speaks this *Parable of the Great Supper*.

The "Great Supper" is "the Kingdom of God" "Supper" being the climax of the day is the fit symbol. "Great" because the viands are abundant and rich, and the guests (though many invited decline to come) eventually numerous, "good many"; these are the Jews; or rather, as v. 21 shows, the leading persons among them—elders, scribes, Pharisees, in distinction from publicans and sinners. According to oriental custom a "servant" is sent to remind those invited that the hour of the feast is at hand: "all things are now ready"—the Messiah has come. The "servant" need not be identified with our Lord, though He is called in Isaiah the "servant of Jehovah"; he represents those who at various times (vs. 17, 21, 23) went sent forth to preach—(1) John the Baptist and our Lord, (2) Our Lord and His Apostles, (3) The Apostles and those who came after. "With one consent" the invitation is declined. Various excuses, all of a thoroughly worldly character, are offered (Matt. 22: 2-7). The first, *pretext* of his purchase must go to see it; anxiety to know how his purchase will turn out detains the second; the third engrossed with sensual pleasure bluntly declines. The host justly incensed when the servant reports to him, commands that "the poor, maimed, halt, blind," (see v. 13) should be called in from the "streets and lanes." These are still of the city—still Jews; these are the "publicans and sinners," many of whom received Christ when the "rulers" rejected Him; even as the wretched and miserable often still believe the Gospel when the rich and self-sufficient spurn it. (1 Cor. 1: 26-31). The servant replies that what his Lord now commands has been done: he has of himself acted as his master bids, so that he can at once reply—it is done. See ch. 7: 25-31.

The Parable now passes from the historic to the prophetic; and the calling of the Gentiles is signified. "Yet there is room"—the guest chamber is far from being filled. The mercy of God is infinite, and the purchase of Christ's blood is not limited to Jews. Command is now given to go beyond Jewry—"to go into the highways and hedges" of the Gentile world—an open invitation to all populations—and by earnest proclamation both of the *terrors* of the Lord and the *riches* of His Grace "compel" them to the feast. "Compel"—as the Angels did Lot: Gen. 19: 6; for the Lord now commands men every where to repent."

The 24th v may be regarded either as the *conclusion* of the *Parable*, or as the words of Christ speaking in His own person. These men who rejected the invitation (v. 7) were incurring the doom of final exclusion from the feast. See Prov 1: 28; Matt. 25: 11, 12, Judgment follows mercy.

October 20th.]

A. D. 32.

Luke xv: 11-24.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

GOLDEN TEXT:—*I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me.*—1 Sam. 31: 17.

This is one of three Parables spoken by our Lord in vindication of Himself and in illustration of God's marvellous grace, when the Pharisees and Scribes complained that He received sinners and ate with them, vs. 1, 2. "If we might venture to make comparison, as we do among the sayings of men, the Parable of the Prodigal Son might be called the crown and pearl of all the Parables." In the part of it under consideration we see (1) the Prodigal's sin; (2) his misery; (3) his penitence; (4) his return to his Father; (5) his father's reception of him. The "certain man" is God our Father. The "two sons," as the circumstances in which the Parable is spoken, shew, represent the "scribes and Pharisees," and the "Publicans and Sinners," rather than the Jews and Gentiles;—though much in the Parable will apply to these latter. The younger son, at emancipated from all proper feeling, and desirous of enjoying a life of sin, away from the restraints of home, claims the "portion of goods falling to him." His foolish request is granted. According to Jewish law this portion would be half that of the elder brother (Deut. 21: 17). Soon the apathy of the life follows, waste of the heart, and home is forsaken. In the "far country," where God is not, the "portion" is soon squandered—all that brings even a false happiness is gone; "there is no such waster as the sinner." And now when riot and lust have run their course "famine arises." The wretched Prodigal discovers that "it is an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord"; he discovers that the gratification of appetites and passions cannot give peace, and that *nothing can compensate* for the loss of truth, purity and love. In mercy, even God has so ordained; for by this sorrow he will recall us to a better mind. Driven by his misery, sinking lower and lower he hires himself to an alien for employment detestable to a Jew. The rage of his hunger (the soul's hunger) craves a share in the food of the swine which he fed. "Husks" pods which grow on the carob tree; used in the East and in Spain as food for swine. His miserable sustenance even is denied him; (some explain,—"he was driven to this food for no man gave him anything better.") How different this from his Father's love! But the divine mercy uses his misery to produce penitence. "He came to himself" he awoke from the delusion. He considers what his folly had lost him. He will seek the home which he has wickedly left, will humble himself in confession of his sin, and will seek the place, not of a son but of a "hired servant." He does as he proposed; for God's hand is already here. Not hard to be won—watching with earnest eye for the first movement homewards—his Father sees him "yet a great way off," and, running to meet him impresses upon him the kiss of reconciliation. (see Jer. 3: 12; Gen. 48: 9; James 4: 8.) And now, pardoned, he has heart to confess. (Ezek. 36: 33.) But reassured by the Father's marvellous love "the intended close of his confession is not uttered."—he says *nothing* about restoration to the *pace* merely of servant. And now the father's affection is lavished upon him. He will shew at once that the place of the restored child is not inferior to that vacated by the erring child. The best robe ("first") is put upon him, the robe of perfect righteousness,—in place of his rags. (Is. 61: 1; Rev. 3: 18; Zech. 3: 4.) A ring,—the token of freedom,—(the Spirit now has made him free)—is put on his hand. His attire is completed, and he is fully prepared for duty by shoes being put on his feet. (Ephes. 6: 15; Zech. 13: 12. The tatted calf, reserved for a season of festive joy, is killed; and great gladness reigns in this home because the lost one is found. "This God is our God for ever and ever."