

did when he had spent all his own substance in sinful waste it fell very sore upon him. "The worst famine of all is 'not a famine of bread or a thirst of water, but of hearing the words of the Lord' (Amos 8: 11); and in such a famine even 'the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst' (v. 13). 'They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns; broken cisterns, that can hold no water.' Jer. 11:13."

V. 15. *He went and joined himself to.* He was not asked, but in his need he pressed himself upon him. *A citizen.* This man was evidently not a Jew for *he sent him into his fields to feed swine.* In famine-time even a kind-hearted man might not be able to do more for him than this. The occupation was most loathsome for a Jew. (Lev. 17: 7.) It shows how low he had fallen. In the eyes of the Pharisees he would be the vilest of sinners.

V. 16. *Husks*; pods of the carob tree, a kind of locust tree, swine's food. *No man gave.* Pity dies in famine when each has little enough for himself. A strange fall, from affluence to the life of a beast.

III. Home Again, 17-24.

V. 17. *When he came to himself.* He began to think who he was. The true self is always lost in a life of selfishness. (Luke 9: 24.) To regain self-respect is the first step upwards. *How many servants.* etc. "What a rich home I left!" He dare not claim it as his own now. He merely pictures the comfort of the place that was once his. The first step in repentance is to think with desire on the pleasures of that father's home. *And I*; the son of a father who had given me such love.

V. 18. *I will arise and go.* True repentance issues in immediate action. *My father.* He knows enough of him to be sure that he will not be utterly disowned. *I have sinned*; hard to say, but far better to say it than to perish in pride too foolish to own to having done wrong. No excuse, no claim, nothing but the simple hard fact of sin, and no refuge but in the father's mercy. *Against heaven and before thee.* Heaven here stands for God.

Every sin is against heaven first, whatever woe it may have caused, whatever injury it may have inflicted.

V. 19. *No more worthy.* He has neither claim to, nor fitness for, a son's place. He scarce dare ask even for a servant's.

V. 20. *Yet a great way off.* On the first sign of his return the father is ready to receive. *Had compassion.* Not justice, but love, provides the reception. His present woful plight and the fact that he has come back remove all thought of stern justice. *Ran and fell on his neck*; eagerness. The attitude of the father throughout towards his son, even before he returned, seems to have been not anger but sorrow. God does not hate the sinner. (Ezek. 33: 11.) *Kissed*; here means kissed tenderly or fervently.

V. 21. *Father, I have sinned.* The son is true to his purpose and repeats all but the request to be made a hired servant. After the warmth of his father's welcome his heart tells him that such a request would be out of place. Or perhaps the father's reply cut him short.

V. 22. *Bring forth quickly* (Rev. Ver.). That reply is to load him with honor; not forgiveness alone, but a joyous restoration. *Best robe.* "These tattered garments hide his true sonship. On with his proper garments, the robe that will honor him most, *quick!*" *Ring*; a signet ring as a sign of authority, not only for wearing but for sealing documents. *Shoes.* Slaves went barefoot.

V. 23, 24. *The fattened calf.* The custom was to slaughter meat just before cooking, and a calf was always kept ready in prime condition for any great occasion. *Was dead*; to all intents and purposes so far as the father was concerned. *Was lost*; out of sight for years though never out of mind. *They began to be merry*; a great welcome for one who has come home, as he thought, in deep disgrace from a famine-stricken country. So the sinner is welcomed by the Father, who says no word about the past. It is blotted out forever. This loving Father, whose sons sinners and publicans were; was very different from the God of the Pharisees.