

THE PRODIGAL'S RECEPTION

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“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”
Luke 15:20.

THERE he is! He is as wretched as misery itself—as filthy as his brute associates who could satisfy themselves with husks—while he could not. His clothes hang about him in rags and what he is on the outside, that he is within. He is disgraced in the eyes of the good and the virtuous remember him with indignation. He has some desires to go back to his father's house but these desires are not sufficient to alter his condition. Mere *desires* have not scraped the filth from him, nor have they so much as patched his rags. Whatever he may or may not desire, he is still filthy, still disgraced, still an alien from his father's house—and he knows it—for, by God's Grace, he has come to himself.

He would have been angry if we had said as much as this before, but now we cannot describe him in words too black. With many tears and sighs he assures us that he is even worse than he appears to be and that no man can know all the depth of the vileness of his conduct—he has spent his living with harlots—he has despised a generous parent's love and broken loose from his wise control. He has done evil with both his hands to the utmost of his strength and opportunity. There he stands, notwithstanding this confession, just what I have described him to be—for even though he has said within himself, “I have sinned”—yet that confession has not removed his griefs.

He acknowledges that he is not worthy to be called a son—and it is true he is not. But his unworthiness is not removed by his consciousness of it nor by his confession of it. He has no claims to a father's love. If that father shuts the door in his face, he acts with justice. If he shall refuse so much as to speak a single word, except words of rebuke, no one can blame the father, for the son has so sadly erred. To this the son utters no denial. He confesses that if he is cast away forever, he well deserves it.

This picture, I know, is the photograph of some who are now present. You feel your vileness and sinfulness but you cannot look upon that sense of vileness as in any way extenuating or altering your condition. You feel, but you cannot *plead*, your feelings. You confess this morning that you have desires towards God but that you have no rights to Him—you cannot demand anything at His hands. If your soul were sent to Hell, His righteous Law approves it and so does your own conscience! You can see your rags. You can mark your filthiness. You can long for something better but you are no better. You have no more claims than you used to have upon God's mercy. You stand here today a self-convicted offender against the loving kindness and holiness of God.

I pray that to such of you as are in this shape I may be the bearer of a message from God to your soul this morning. O you who know the Lord, put up earnest and silent prayers just now that my message may come home with power to troubled consciences! And I beseech you, for your own profit, look back to the hole of the pit where you were dug and to the miry clay where you were drawn and remember how God received you! And while we talk of what He is willing and able to do to the far-off sinners, let your souls leap with joyous gratitude at the recollection of how He received you into His love and made you partakers of His Grace in days gone by.

There are two things in the text—the first is the condition of many a seeker—he is yet a great way off. And then, secondly, the matchless kindness of the Father towards him.

I. First, dear Friends, THE CONDITION OF SUCH A SEEKER—HE IS YET A GREAT WAY OFF. He is a great way off if you consider one or two things. Remember his need of strength. This poor young man had, for some time, been without food—brought so very low that the husks upon which the swine fed would have seemed a dainty to him if he could have eaten them. He is so hungry that he has become emaciated and to him every mile has the weariness of leagues within it.

It costs him many pains and sore griefs to drag himself along, even though it is but an inch. So the sinner is a long way off from God when you consider his utter need of strength to come to God. Even such strength as God has given him

is very painfully used. God has given him strength enough to desire salvation but those desires are always accompanied with deep and sincere grief for sin. The point which he has already reached has exhausted all his power and all he can do is fall down before Jesus and say—

*“Oh, for this no strength have I,
My strength is at Your feet to lie.”*

He is a great way off, again, if you consider his need of *courage*. He longs to see his father but yet the probabilities are that if his father should come he would run away—the very sound of his father's footsteps would act upon him as they did on Adam in the garden—he would hide himself among the trees. So instead of crying after his father, the great father would have to cry after him—“Where are you, poor fallen creature? Where are you?” His need of courage, therefore, makes the distance long—for every step up to now has been taken as though into the jaws of death. “Ah,” says the sinner, “it must be a long time before I can dare to hope—for my inequities have gone over my head so that I cannot look up.”

Are you, then, in alarm and dread this morning? Do your prayers seem to have been no prayers at all? When you think of God, does terror come over your mind and you feel that you are a long, long way from Him? Do you imagine that it is not likely that He will hear your cries nor give heed to your words? You are yet a great way off. You are a great way off when we consider the difficulty of the way of repentance. John Bunyan tells us that Christian found, when he went back to the arbor after his lost roll, that it was very hard work going back. Every backslider finds it so and every penitent sinner knows that there is a bitterness in mourning for sin comparable to the loss of one's only son.

A drowning man feels no great pain—the sensations of drowning are even said to be pleasant. It is only when the man is being restored to life—when the blood begins to make the veins tingle because life leaps there, when once again the nerves are sensitive—then, we are told, the whole body is full of many agonies! But then they are the agonies of life! And so the poor penitent feels the goal must be a great way off, for if he had to feel as he now feels, even for a month, it were too long a time. And if he had to journey many miles as he now journeys, so painfully, with such bleeding feet, it would, indeed, be a great way!

Let us look into this matter and show that while the road seems long on this account, it really is long if we view it in a certain light. There are many seeking sinners who are a great way off in their life. I think I see the man now and hear him thus bewail himself—“I have left off my drunkenness. I could not sit where I used to sit by the hour. I thank God I shall never be seen reeling through the streets again, for that groveling lust I detest. I have given up Sabbath-breaking and I am found in God's House. And I have endeavored, as much as I can, to renounce the habit of swearing, but still I am a great way off—I do not feel as if I could yet lay hold of Christ for I cannot master my own passions yet.

“An old companion stopped me this week and he had not long been talking before I found the old man was in me and the old lusting came up into my face again. Why, Sir, the other day an oath came rapping out. I thought I had got over it, but I had not—I am a great way off. When I read of what saints are and observe what true Christians are, I do feel that my conduct is so inconsistent and so widely apart from what it ought to be that I *know* that I am a great way off.”

“Ah, dear Friend, you are. And if you had to come to God by the way of your own righteousness you would never reach Him for He is not thus to be found. Christ Jesus is the way! He is the safe, sure, and perfect road to God. He who sees Jesus has seen the Father. But he who looks to himself will only see despair. The road to Heaven by Mount Sinai is impassable by mortal man, but Calvary leads to Glory! The secret places of the stairs are in the wounds of Jesus.

Again, you feel yourself a great way off as to *knowledge*. “Why,” you say, “before I felt thus I considered myself a master of all theology. I could twist the doctrines round my fingers. When I listened to a sermon I felt quite able to criticize it and to give my judgment. Now I see that my judgment was about as valuable as the criticism of a blind man upon a picture, for I was without *spiritual* sight. Now I feel myself to be a fool! I do know what sin means, but only to a degree. Even here I feel that I am not conscious of the heinousness of human guilt. I have heard the doctrine of the Atonement of Christ and I thank God I know it to some degree, but the excellence and glory of the Substitutionary Sacrifice which Christ offered—I confess I do not fully comprehend.”

The sinner's confession now is that instead of understanding Scripture he finds he needs to go, like a child, to school to learn the A B C of it. “O Sir,” he says, “I am a great way off from God for I am so ignorant, so foolish. I seem to be but as a beast when I think of the deep things of God.” Ah, poor Soul! Poor young wandering Brother! I wonder not that it seems so to you for the ignorance of the carnal man is, indeed, fearful, and only God can give you light. But He can give it to you in a *moment* and the distance between you and Him upon the score of ignorance can be bridged at once and you

may comprehend even today, with all saints, what are the heights and depths and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

In another point many an earnest seeker is a great way off, I mean in his *repentance*. “Alas,” says he, “I cannot repent as I ought. If only I could feel the brokenness of heart which I have heard and seen in some! Oh, what would I give for penitential sighs! How thankful would I be if my head were waters and my eyes fountains of tears. If I could even feel that I was as humble as the poor publican and could stand with downcast eyes and beat upon my breast and say, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’ But, alas, I have been a hearer of the Word for years and all the progress I have made is so little that while I know the Gospel is true, I do not *feel* it. I know myself to be a sinner, and sometimes I mourn over it, but my mourning is so superficial, my repentance is a repentance that needs to be *repented* of! O Sir, if God would use the heaviest hammer that He had—if He would but break my heart—every broken fragment should bless His name!”

“I wish I had a genuine repentance. Oh, how I pant to be brought to feel that I am lost and to desire Christ with that vehement desire which will not take a denial. But in this point my heart seems hard as Hell-hardened steel. Cold as a rock of ice. It will not, *cannot* yield though wooed by Divine love. Adamant itself may run in liquid torrents, but my soul yields to nothing. Lord, break it! Lord, break it!”

Ah, poor Heart. I see you are a great way off, but do you know if my Lord should appear to you this morning and say to you, “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” your heart would break in a moment?—

*“Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone.
But a sense of blood-bought pardon,
Can dissolve a heart of stone.”*

Great way off as you are, if the Lord pardons you while yet callous and consciously hard of heart, will you not then fall at His feet and commend that great love with which He loved you—even when you were dead in trespasses and sins?

Yes, but I think I hear one say, “There is another point in which I feel a great way off, for I have little or no *faith*. I have heard faith preached every Sunday. I know what it is—I think I do—but I cannot reach it. I know that if I cast myself wholly upon Christ I shall be saved. I quite comprehend that He does not ask anything of me, any willings, or doings, or feelings—I know that Christ is willing to receive the greatest sinner out of Hell if that sinner will but come and simply trust Him. I have tried to do it! Sometimes I have thought I had faith, but then, again, when I have looked at my sins I have doubted so dreadfully that I perceive I have no faith at all! There are bright moments with me when I think I can say—

*‘My faith is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness,’*

but oh, when I feel my corruptions within rising upon me, I hear a voice saying, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson,’ and straightway I discover my own weakness. I have not the faith that I want! I am a great way off from it and I fear that I shall never possess it.”

Yes, my Brethren, I perceive your difficulty, for I have felt the sorrow of it myself. But oh, my Lord, who is the Giver of faith—who is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins—can give you the faith you so much desire and can cause you, *this morning*, to rest with perfect confidence upon the work which He has finished for you! To gather up all things in one word, the truly penitent sinner feels that he is yet a great way off in *everything*. There is no point upon which you can talk with him but it will be sure to lead to a confession of his deficiency. Begin to put him in the scales of the sanctuary and he cries, “Alas, before you put in the weights I can tell you I shall be found wanting.” Bring him to the touchstone and he shrinks from it! “No,” he says, “but I cannot endure any sort of trial—

‘All unholy and unclean, I am nothing else but sin.’ ”

Look, look how well my Master has pictured your case in this parable—“Yet a great way off”—yet covered with rags! Yet polluted with filth! Yet in disgrace! Yet a stranger to your Father’s house! There is only this one point about you—you have your face towards your Father—you have a desire towards God and you would, oh, you would if you could, lay hold upon eternal life! But you feel too far off for anything like comfortable hope.

Now I must confess I feel many fears about you who are in this state. I am afraid lest you should come so far and yet go back—for there are many whom we thought had come as far as this and yet they have gone back, after all. Oh, remember that *desires* after God will not change you so as to *save* you! You must find Christ! Remember that to say, “I will arise,” is not enough, nor even to arise—you must never rest till your Father has given you the kiss—till He has put the best robe on you.

I am afraid lest you should rest satisfied and say, "I am in a good state. The minister tells us that many are brought to such a state before they are saved. I will stop here." My dear Friend, it is a good state to pass through, but it is a bad state to rest in. I pray you never are content with a *sense* of sin, never be satisfied with merely knowing that you are not what you ought to be. It never cures the fever for a man to know he has it. His knowledge is in some degree a good sign, for it proves that the fever has not yet driven him to delirium. But it never gives a man perfect health to know that he is sick. It is a good thing for him to know it, for he will not otherwise send for the physician—but unless it leads to that he will die whether he feels himself to be sick or not.

A mere consciousness that you are hungry while your father's hired servants have bread enough to spare will not lessen your hunger—you need more than this. You are a great way off and I beseech you remember what the danger is lest you should stop here or should lose what sensibility you already have. Perhaps despair may come upon you. Some have committed suicide while under a sense of the greatness of their distance from God because they dared not look to the Savior. Our prayers shall go up to God that the second part of our text may come true to you and that backsliding and despair alike may be prevented by the speedy coming of God dressed in the robes of Grace to meet your guilty soul and give you joy and peace through believing!

II. Secondly—and O, may the Master give us His help—we have to consider THE MATCHLESS KINDNESS OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER. We must take each word and dwell upon it. First of all we have here Divine *observation*. "When he was yet a great way off his father saw him." It is true He has always seen him. God sees the sinner in every state and in every position. Yes, and sees him with an eye of love, too—such a chosen sinner as is described in this text—not with complacency, but with affection God looks upon His wandering chosen ones.

I say that Father saw His son when he spent his living with harlots. He saw him with deep sorrow when he gladly would have filled his belly with the husks which the swine ate. But now, if there can be such a thing as for Divine Omniscience to become more exact, the Father sees him with an eye full of a more tender love, a greater care. "His father saw him." Oh, what a sight it was for a father to see! His son, it is true, but his *reprobate* son, who had dishonored his father's name—brought down the name of an honorable house to be mentioned among the dregs and scum of the earth!

There he is! What a sight for a father's eye! He is filthy, as though he had been rolling in the mire. And his fine clothing has long ago lost its fine colors and hangs about him in wretched rags. The father does not turn away and try to forget him—he fixes his full gaze upon him. Sinner, you know that God sees you this morning! Sitting in this house you are observed by the God of Heaven. There is not a desire in your heart unread by Him, nor a tear in your eye which He does not observe! I tell you He has seen your midnight sins. He has heard your cursing and your blasphemies and yet He has loved you notwithstanding all that you have done!

You could hardly have been a worse rebel against Him and yet He has noted you in His book of love and determined to save you! The eye of His love has followed you wherever you have gone. Is there not some comfort here? Why could not he see his father? Was it the effect of the tears in his eyes that he could not see? Or was it that his father was of quicker sight than he? Sinner, you can not see God for you are unbelieving and carnal and blind, but He can see you! Your tears of penitence block up your sight, but your Father is quick of eye and He beholds you and loves you now. In every glance there is love.

"His father saw him." Observe this was a loving observation, for it is written, "His father saw him." He did not see him as a mere casual observer. He did not note him as a man might note his friend's child with some pity and benevolence, but he marked him as a father, alone, can do. What a quick eye a parent has! Why, I have known a young man come home, perhaps for a short holiday—the mother has heard nothing, not even a whisper, as to her son's conduct and yet she cannot help observing to her husband, "There is a something about John which makes me suspect that he is not going on as he should do. I do not know, my Husband," she says, "what it is. But yet I am sure he is getting among bad companions." She will read his character at once. And the father notes something, too. He cannot precisely say what, but he knows it to be cause for anxiety.

But here we have a Father who can see everything and who has as much of the quickness of love as He has of the certainty of knowledge. He can, therefore, see every spot and bruise and note every putrefying sore. He sees His poor son right through as though he were a vase of crystal—He reads his heart—not merely the telltale garments. Not merely the sorrowful tale of the unwashed face and those clouded shoes, but He can read his soul! He understands the whole of his miserable plight. O poor Sinner, there is no need for you to give information to your God for He knows it already! You need not pick your words in prayer in order to make your case plain and easy to understand! God can see it! All you have

to do is to uncover your wounds, your bruises and your putrefying sores and say, "My Father, You see it all, the black tale you read in a moment. My Father, have pity upon me."

The next thought to be well considered is Divine *compassion*. "When he saw him he had compassion on him." Does not the word "compassion" mean suffering with, or, fellow-suffering? What is compassion, then, but putting yourself into the place of the sufferer and feeling his grief? If I may say so, the father put himself into the son's rags and then felt as much pity for him as that poor ragged prodigal could have felt for himself. I do not know how to bring up your compassion this morning unless it is by supposing that it is your own case.

I saw, not many hours ago, a young man who brought to my mind the prodigal in this case—his face marked with innumerable lines of sin and wretchedness. His body lean and emaciated, his clothes close-buttoned—his whole appearance the very mirror of woe. He knocked at my door. I knew his situation—I cannot hurt him by telling it. He had disgraced his family—not once or twice—but many times. At last he drew out what money he had in the business of a respectable family, came up to London with four hundred pounds and in about five weeks spent it all!

And, without a single farthing to help himself, he often begs for bread. And I fear that he has often crept at night into the parks to sleep and thus has brought aches and pains into his bones which will be with him till he dies. He wanders the streets by day a vagabond and a reprobate. I have written to his friends—the case has been put before them. They will not have anything to do with him. And considering his shameful conduct, I do not wonder. He has no father and no mother left. If he were helped beyond mere food and lodging, as far as we can judge, it would be money thrown away.

If he were helped, he seems so desperately set on wickedness that he would do the same again. Yet, as I think, I can but desire to see him have one more chance, at least, and he would have it, I doubt not, if his father yet lived. But others feel the fountains of their love are stayed. As I think of him, I cannot but feel that if he were a son of mine and I were his father and I saw him in such a case come to my door, whatever the crime was that he had committed, I must fall upon his neck and kiss him. The biggest sin could not put out forever the sparks of paternal love. I might condemn the sin in sharpest terms and most severely. I might regret that he had ever been born and cry with David, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for you!" but I could not shut him out of my house, nor refuse to call him my child. My child he is and my child he shall be till he dies.

You feel just now that if it were your child you would do the same. That is how God feels towards you, His chosen, His repentant child. You are His child—I hope so, I trust so—those desires which you have in your soul towards Him make me feel that you are one of His children. And as God looks out of Heaven He knows what you mean. What is it? What shall I say? No, I need not describe, but, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." He will have compassion upon you. He will receive you to His bosom—be of good courage, for the text says, "He had compassion on him."

Notice and observe carefully the swiftness of this Divine love. "He ran." Probably he was walking on the top of his house and looking out for his son, when one morning he just caught a glimpse of a poor sorry figure in the distance. If he had been anything but the father he would not have known it to be his son. But he looked and looked again, till at last he said, "It is he! Oh, what marks of famine are upon him and of suffering, too!" And down comes the old gentleman—I think I see him running downstairs and the servants come to the windows and the doors, and say, "Where is Master going? I have not seen him run at that rate for many a day."

See, there he goes! He does not take the road for that is a little round about. But there is a gap through the hedge and he is jumping over it! The straightest way that he can find he chooses. And before the son has had time to notice who it is, he is on him and has his arms about him, falling upon his neck and kissing him! I remember a young prodigal who was received in the same way. Here he stands. It is I, myself. I sat in a little Chapel, little dreaming that my Father saw me. Certainly I was a great way off.

I felt something of my need of Christ, but I did not know what I must do to be saved. Though taught the letter of the Word, I was spiritually ignorant of the plan of salvation. Though taught it from my youth up, I knew it not. I felt, but I did not feel what I wished to feel. If ever there was a soul that knew itself to be far off from God, I was that soul. And yet in a moment, in one single *moment*—no sooner had I heard the words—"Look unto Me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth"—no sooner had I turned my eyes to Jesus Crucified than I felt my perfect reconciliation with God! I knew my sins were then forgiven!

There was no time for getting out of my heavenly Father's way—it was done and done in an instant! And in my case, at least, He ran and fell upon my neck to kiss me. I hope that will be the case this morning—before you can get out of

this place—before you can get back to your old doubts and fears and sighs and cries—I hope here the Lord of Love will run and meet you and fall upon your neck and kiss you!

After noticing thus—observation, compassion and swiftness, do not forget the *nearness*—“He fell upon his neck and kissed him.” This I can understand by experience, but it is too wonderful for me to explain. “He fell upon his neck.” He did not stand at a distance and say, “John, I would be very glad to kiss you but you are too filthy. I do not know what may be under those filthy rags. I do not feel inclined to fall upon your neck just yet—you are too far gone for me. I love you, but there is a limit to the display of love. When I have got you into a proper state, then I may manifest my affection to you but I cannot just now, while you are so very foul.”

Oh, no! But *before* he is washed He falls on his neck—*there* is the wonder of it! I can understand how God manifests His love to a soul that is washed in Jesus' blood and knows it. But how He could fall upon the neck of a foul, filthy sinner as such! There it is—not as sanctified, not as having anything good in himself—but as nothing but a filthy, foul, desperate rebel, God falls upon his neck and kisses him! Oh, strange miracle of love! The riddle is solved when you remember that God never had looked upon that sinner as he was in himself—He had always looked upon him as he was in Christ!

And when He fell upon that prodigal's neck, He did, in effect, only fall upon the neck of His once-suffering Son, Jesus Christ, and He kissed the sinner because He saw him in Christ! He did not see the sinner's loathsomeness, but saw only Christ's loveliness and therefore kissed him as He would have kissed his Substitute. Observe how near God comes to the sinner! It was said of that eminent saint and martyr, Bishop Hooper, that on one occasion a man in deep distress was allowed to go into his prison to tell his tale of conscience. But Bishop Hooper looked so sternly upon him and addressed him so severely, at first, that the poor soul ran away and could not get comfort until he had sought out another minister of a gentler aspect.

Now Hooper really was a gracious and loving soul, but the sternness of his manner kept the penitent off. There is no such stern manner in our heavenly Father! He loves to receive His prodigals. When He comes there is no, “Hold off!” No “Keep off!” to the sinner. No, He falls upon his neck and He kisses him! There is yet another thought to be brought out of the metaphor of kissing. We are not to pass that over without dipping our cup in the honey. In kissing his son the father recognizes *relationship*. He said, with emphasis, “You are *my*son,” and the prodigal was—

*“To his Father's bosom pressed,
Once for all a child confessed.”*

Again, that kiss was the seal of forgiveness. He would not have kissed him if he had been angry with him. He forgave him, forgave him all. There was, moreover, something more than forgiveness—there was acceptance—“I receive you back into my heart as though you were worthy of all that I give to your elder brother and therefore I kiss you.” Surely this was also a kiss of delight—as if he took pleasure in him, delighting in him, feasting his eyes with the sight of him and feeling more happy to see him than to see all his fields and the fatted calves and all the treasures that he possessed! His delight was in seeing this poor restored child. Surely this is all summed up in a kiss.

And if this morning my Father and your Father should come out to meet mourning penitents, in a moment He will show you that you are His children! You shall say, “Abba, Father,” on your road to your own house! You shall feel that your sins are all forgiven, that every particle has been cast behind Jehovah's back! You shall feel today that you are accepted—as your faith looks to Christ you shall see that God accepts you—because Christ your Substitute is worthy of God's love and God's delight! I trust you shall, this very morning, delight yourself in God, because God delights Himself in you and you shall hear Him whisper in your ear, “You shall be called Hephzibah . . . for the Lord delights in you.”

I wish I could picture such a text as this as it ought to be. It needs some tender, sympathetic heart—some man who is the very soul of pathos—to work out the tender touches of such a verse as this! But, oh, though I cannot describe it, I hope you will feel it and that is better than description. I come not here to paint the scene, except to be the brush in God's hand to paint it on your hearts. There are some of you who can say, “I do not want descriptions, for I have felt it. I went to Christ and told Him my case and prayed Him to meet me. Now I believe on Him and I have gone my way rejoicing in Him.”

We will just say these words and have done. In summing up, one may notice that this sinner, though he was a great way off, was not received to full pardon and adoption and acceptance by a *gradual* process, but he was received at once! He was not allowed to enter into the outhouse first and to sleep in a barn at night. And then afterwards allowed to come, sometimes, and have his meals with the servants in the kitchen. And then afterwards allowed to sit at the end of the table and by degrees brought near. No. The father fell on his neck and kissed him the first moment! He gets as near to God, as he ever will, the very first moment! So a saved soul may not enjoy and know so much, but he is as near and dear to God the first moment he believes

as he ever will be—a true heir of all things in Christ and as truly so as even when he shall mount to Heaven to be glorified and to be like his Lord.

Oh, what a wonder is this! Fresh from his pigsty, was he not? Yet in a father's bosom! Fresh from the swine with their grunts in his ears and now he hears a father's loving words! A few days ago he was putting husks to his mouth and now it is a father's lips that are on his lips. What a change and all at once! I say there is no gradual process in this, but the thing is done at once—in a moment he comes to his father—his father comes to him and he is in his father's arms!

Observe again, as there was not a gradual reception, there was not a *partial* reception. He was not forgiven on conditions. He was not received to his father's heart if he would do so-and-so. No. There were no "ifs," no "buts." He was kissed and clothed and feasted without a single condition of any kind whatever. No questions asked—his father had cast his offenses behind his back in a moment and he was received without even a censure or a rebuke. It was not a partial reception. He was not received to some things and refused others. He was not, for instance, allowed to call himself a child, but to think of himself an inferior. No! He wears the best robe. He has the ring on his finger. He has the shoes on his feet. And he joins in eating the fatted calf.

And so the sinner is not received to a second-class place, but he is taken to the full position of a child of God. It is not a gradual nor yet a partial reception. And once more, it is not a temporary reception. His father did not kiss him and then turn him out at the back door. He did not receive him for a time, and then afterwards say to him, "Go your way. I have had pity upon you. You have now a new start—go into the far country and mend your ways." No, the father would say to him what he had already said to the elder brother, "Son, you are ever with me and all that I have is yours."

In the parable, the son could not have the goods restored for he had spent his part. But in truth itself and matter of fact, God makes the man who comes in at the eleventh hour equal with the one who came in at the first hour of the day—He gives every man the penny. And He gives to the child who has been the most wandering the same privileges and ultimately the same heritage which He gives to His own who have been these many years with Him and have not transgressed His Commandments.

That is a remarkable passage in one of the Prophets, where he says, "Ekron as a Jebusite," meaning that the Philistine, when converted, should be treated just the same as the original inhabitants of Jerusalem—that the branches of the olive which were grafted in have the same privileges as the original branches! When God takes men from being heirs of wrath and makes them heirs of Grace they have just as much privilege at the first as though they had been heirs of Grace twenty years! In God's sight they always were heirs of Grace and from all eternity He viewed His most wandering sons—

*"Not as they stood in Adam's fall,
When sin and ruin covered all.
But as they'll stand another day,
Fairer than the sun's meridian ray."*

O, I would to God that He would in His infinite mercy bring some of His own dear children home this day and He shall have the praise, world without end. Amen.

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