

PRODIGAL LOVE FOR THE PRODIGAL SON

NO. 2236

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 27, 1891,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MARCH 29, 1891.

“And kissed him.”
Luke 15:20.

IN the Revised Version, if you will kindly look at the margin, you will find that the text there reads, “*And kissed him much.*” This is a very good translation of the Greek, which might bear the meaning, “Kissed him earnestly,” or “Kissed him eagerly,” or “Kissed him often.” I prefer to have it in very plain language, and therefore adopt the marginal reading of the Revised Version, “Kissed him much,” as the text of my sermon, the subject of which will be, the overflowing love of God toward the returning sinner.

The first word “and” links us on to all that had gone before. The parable is a very familiar one, yet it is so full of sacred meaning that it always has some fresh lesson for us. Let us, then, consider the preliminaries to this kissing. On the son’s side there was something, and on the father’s side much more. Before the prodigal son received these kisses of love, he had said in the far country, “I will arise and go to my father.” He had, however, done more than that, otherwise his father’s kiss would never have been upon his cheek. The resolve had become a deed: “He arose, and came to his father.” A bushel full of resolutions is of small value; a single grain of practice is worth the whole. The determination to return home is good, but it is when the wandering boy begins the business of really carrying out the good resolve that he draws near the blessing. If any of you here present have long been saying, “I will repent; I will turn to God;” leave off resolving, and come to practicing, and may God in His mercy lead you both to repent and to believe in Christ!

Before the kisses of love were given, this young man was on his way to his father, but he would not have reached him unless his father had come the major part of the way. When you give God an inch, He will give you a mile. If you come a little way to Him, when you are “yet a great way off” He will run to meet you. I do not know that the prodigal saw his father, but his father saw him. The eyes of mercy are quicker than the eyes of repentance. Even the eye of our faith is dim compared with the eye of God’s love. He sees a sinner long before a sinner sees Him.

I do not suppose that the prodigal traveled very fast. I should imagine that he came very slowly—

*“With heavy heart and downcast eye,
 With many a sob and many a sigh.”*

He was resolved to come, yet he was half afraid. But we read that his father ran. Slow are the steps of repentance, but swift are the feet of forgiveness. God can run where we can scarcely limp, and if we are limping towards Him, He will run towards us. These kisses were given in a hurry; the story is narrated in a way that almost makes us realize that such was the case; there is a sense of haste in the very wording of it. His father “ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him”—kissed him eagerly. He did not delay a moment, for though he was out of breath, he was not out of love. “He fell on his neck, and kissed him much.” There stood his son ready to confess his sin; therefore did his father kiss him all the more. The more willing you are to own your sin, the more willing is God to forgive you. When you make a clean breast of it, God will soon make a clear record of it. He will wipe out the sin that you do willingly acknowledge and humbly confess before Him. He that was willing to use his lips for confession found that his father was willing to use his lips for kissing him.

See the contrast. There is the son, scarcely daring to think of embracing his father, yet his father has scarcely seen him before he has fallen on his neck. The condescension of God towards penitent sinners is very great. He seems to stoop from His throne of glory to fall upon the neck of a repentant sinner. God on the neck of a sinner! What a wonderful picture! Can you conceive it? I do not think you can, but if you cannot imagine it, I hope that you will realize it. When God's arm is about our neck, and His lips are on our cheek, kissing us much, then we understand more than preachers or books can ever tell us of His condescending love.

The father "saw" his son. There is a great deal in that word, "saw." He saw who it was; he saw where he had come from; saw the swineherd's dress; saw the filth upon his hands and feet; saw his rags; saw his penitent look; saw what he had been; saw what he was; and saw what he would soon be. "His father saw him." God has a way of seeing men and women that you and I cannot understand. He sees right through us at a glance, as if we were made of glass; He sees all our past, present and future.

"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." It was not with icy eyes that the father looked on his returning son. Love leaped into them, and as he beheld him, he "had compassion on him;" that is, he felt for him. There was no anger in his heart towards his son; he had nothing but pity for his poor boy, which had got into such a pitiable condition. It was true that it was all his own fault, but that did not come before his father's mind. It was the state that he was in, his poverty, his degradation, that pale face of his so wan with hunger that touched his father to the quick. And God has compassion on the woes and miseries of men. They may have brought their troubles on themselves, and they have indeed done so, but nevertheless God has compassion upon them. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."

We read that the father "ran." The compassion of God is followed by swift movements. He is slow to anger, but He is quick to bless. He does not take any time to consider how He shall show His love to penitent prodigals; that was all done long ago in the eternal covenant. He has no need to prepare for their return to Him; that was all done on Calvary. God comes flying in the greatness of His compassion to help every poor penitent soul—

*"On cherub and on cherubim,
Full royally He rode;
And on the wings of mighty winds
Came flying all abroad."*

And when He comes, He comes to kiss. Master Trapp says that, if we had read that the father had kicked his prodigal son, we should not have been very much astonished. Well, I would have been very greatly astonished, seeing that the father in the parable was to represent God. But still, his son deserved all the rough treatment that some heartless men might have given, and had the story been that of a selfish human father only, it might have been written that "as he was coming near, his father ran at him, and kicked him." There are such fathers in the world, who seem as if they cannot forgive. If he had kicked him, it would have been no more than he had deserved. But no, what is written in the Bible stands true for all time, and for every sinner—"He fell on his neck, and kissed him;" kissed him eagerly, kissed him much.

What does this much kissing mean? It signifies that when sinners come to God, He gives them a loving reception, and a hearty welcome. If any of you, while I am speaking, shall come to God, expecting mercy because of the great sacrifice of Christ, this shall be true of you as it has been true of many of us: "He kissed him much."

I. First, this much kissing means MUCH LOVE. It means much love truly *felt*, for God never gives an expression of love without feeling it in His infinite heart. God will never give a Judas-kiss, and betray those whom He embraces. There is no hypocrisy with God; He never kisses those for whom He has no love. Oh, how God loves sinners! You who repent, and come to Him, will discover how greatly He loves you. There is no measuring the love He bears towards you. He has loved you from before the foundation of the world, and He will love you when time shall be no more. Oh, the immeasurable love of God to sinners who come and cast themselves upon His mercy!

This much kissing also means much love *manifested*. God's people do not always know the greatness of His love to them. Sometimes, however, it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is

given to us. Some of us know at times what it is to be almost too happy to live! The love of God has been so overpoweringly experienced by us on some occasions that we have almost had to ask for a stay of the delight because we could not endure any more. If the glory had not been veiled a little, we should have died of excess of rapture, or happiness. Beloved, God has wondrous ways of opening His people's hearts to the manifestation of His grace. He can pour in, not now and then a drop of His love, but great and mighty streams. Madame Guyon used to speak of the torrents of love that come swooping through the spirit, bearing all before them. The poor prodigal in the parable had so much love manifested to him that he might have sung of the torrents of his father's affection. That is the way God receives those whom He saves, giving them not a meager measure of grace, but manifesting an overflowing love.

This much kissing means, further, much love *perceived*. When his father kissed him much, the poor prodigal knew, if never before, that his father loved him. He had no doubt about it; he had a clear perception of it. It is very frequently the case that the first moment a sinner believes in Jesus, he gets this "much" love. God reveals it to him, and he perceives it and enjoys it at the very beginning. Think not that God always keeps the best wine for the last; He gives us some of the richest dainties of His table the first moment we sit there. I recollect the joy that I had when first I believed in Jesus, and, even now, in looking back upon it, the memory of it is as fresh as if it were but yesterday. Oh, I could not have believed that a mortal could be so happy after having been so long burdened, and so terribly cast down! I did but look to Jesus on the cross, and the crushing load was immediately gone, and the heart which could only sigh and cry by reason of its burden, began to leap and dance and sing for joy. I had found in Christ all that I wanted, and I rested in the love of God at once. So may it be with you also, if you will but return to God through Christ. It shall be said of you as of this prodigal, "The father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him in much love."

II. Secondly, this much kissing means MUCH FORGIVENESS. The prodigal had many sins to confess, but before he came to the details of them, his father had forgiven him. I love confession of sin after forgiveness. Some suppose that after we are forgiven we are never to confess, but, oh, beloved, it is then that we confess most truly, because we know the guilt of sin most really! Then do we plaintively sing—

*"My sins, my sins, my Savior,
How sad on You they fall!
Seen through Your gentle patience,
I tenfold feel them all.
I know they are forgiven,
But still their pain to me
Is all the grief and anguish
They laid, my Lord, on Thee."*

To think that Christ should have washed me from my sins in His own blood makes me feel my sin the more keenly, and confess it the more humbly before God. The picture of this prodigal is marvelously true to the experience of those who return to God. His father kissed him with the kiss of forgiveness, and yet, after that, the young man went on to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son." Do not hesitate, then, to acknowledge your sin to God, even though you know that in Christ it is all put away.

From this point of view, those kisses meant, first, "*Your sin is all gone*, and will never be mentioned any more. Come to My heart, My son! You have grieved Me sorely and angered Me, but, as a thick cloud, I have blotted out your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins."

As the father looked upon him, and kissed him much, there probably came another kiss, which seemed to say, "*There is no soreness left*; I have not only forgiven, but I have forgotten too. It is all gone, clean gone. I will never accuse you of it any more. I will never love you any the less. I will never treat you as though you were still an unworthy and untrustworthy person." Probably at that there came another kiss, for do not forget that his father forgave him "and kissed him much," to show that the sin was all forgiven.

There stood the prodigal, overwhelmed by his father's goodness, yet remembering his past life. As he looked on himself, and thought, "I have these old rags on still, and I have just come from feeding the swine," I can imagine that his father would give him another kiss, as much as to say, "My boy, I do not

recollect the past; I am so glad to see you that *I do not see any filth on you, or any rags* on you, either. I am so delighted to have you with me once more that, as I would pick up a diamond out of the mire, and be glad to get the diamond again, so do I pick you up, you are so precious to me.” This is the gracious and glorious way in which God treats those who return to Him. As for their sin, He has put it away so that He will not remember it. He forgives like a God. Well may we adore and magnify His matchless mercy as we sing—

*“In wonder lost, with trembling joy
We take the pardon of our God;
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye;
A pardon bought with Jesus’ blood;
Who is pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”*

“Well,” says one, “can such a wonderful change ever take place with me?” By the grace of God it may be experienced by every person who is willing to return to God. I pray God that it may happen now, and that you may get such assurance of it from the Word of God, by the power of His Holy Spirit, and from a sight of the precious blood of Christ shed for your redemption, that you may be able to say, “I understand it now; I see how He kisses all my sins away; and when it rises, He kisses it away again, and when I think of it with shame, He gives me another kiss; and when I blush all over at the remembrance of my evil deeds, He kisses me again and again, to assure me that I am fully and freely forgiven.” Thus the many kisses from the prodigal’s father combined to make his wayward son feel that his sin was indeed all gone. They revealed much love and much forgiveness.

III. These repeated kisses meant, next, FULL RESTORATION. The prodigal was going to say to his father, “Make me as one of your hired servants.” In the far country he had resolved to make that request, but his father, with a kiss, stopped him. By that kiss, his *sonship was owned*; by it the father said to the wretched wanderer, “You are my son.” He gave him such a kiss as he would only give to his own son. I wonder how many here have ever given such a kiss to anyone. There sits one who knows something of such kisses as the prodigal received. That father’s girl went astray, and, after years of sin, she came back worn out, to die at home. He received her, found her penitent, and gladly welcomed her to his house. Ah, my dear friend, you know something about such kisses as those! And you, good woman, whose boy ran away, you can understand something about these kisses, too. He left you, and you did not hear from him for years, and he went on in a very vicious course of life. When you did hear from him, it well-near broke your heart, and when he came back, you hardly knew him. Do you recollect how you took him in? You felt that you wished that he was the little boy you used to press to your bosom, but now he was grown up to be a big man and a great sinner, yet you gave him such a kiss, and repeated your welcome so often, that he will never forget it, nor will you forget it either. You can understand that this overwhelming greeting was like the father saying, “My boy, you are my son. Despite all that you have done, you belong to me; however far you have gone in vice and folly, I own you. You are bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.” In this parable Christ would have you know, poor sinner, that God will own you, if you come to Him confessing your sin through Jesus Christ. He will gladly receive you, for all things are ready against the day that you return—

*“Spread for you the festal board,
See with richest dainties stored,
To your Father’s bosom pressed,
Yet again a child confessed;
Never from his house to roam,
Come and welcome, sinner, come.”*

The father received his son with many kisses, and so proved that his *prayer was answered*. Indeed, his father heard his prayer before he offered it. He was going to say, “Father, I have sinned,” and to ask for forgiveness, but he got the mercy, and a kiss to seal it, before the prayer was presented. This also shall be true of you, O sinner, who are returning to your God through Jesus Christ! You shall be permitted to pray, and God will answer you. Hear it, poor, despairing sinner, whose prayer has seemed to be shut out from heaven! Come to your Father’s bosom now, and He will hear your prayers; and, before

many days are over, you shall have the clearest proofs that you are fully restored to the divine favor by answers to your intercessions that shall make you marvel at the Lord's loving-kindness to you.

Further than this, you shall have all your *privileges restored*, even as this wandering young man was put among the children when he returned. As you see him now in the father's house, where he was received with the many kisses, he wears a son's robe, the family ring is on his finger, and the shoes of the home are on his feet. He eats no longer swine's food, but children's bread. Even thus shall it be with you if you return to God. Though you look so foul and so vile, and really are even more defiled than you look; and though you smell so strongly of the hogs among which you have been living that some people's nostrils would turn up at you, your Father will not notice these marks of your occupation in the far country with all its horrible defilement. See how this father treats his boy. He kisses him, and kisses him again, because he knows his own child, and, recognizing him as his child, and feeling his fatherly heart yearning over him, he gives him kiss after kiss. He kisses him much, to make him know that he has full restoration.

In this repeated kissing we see, then, these three things: much love, much forgiveness, and full restoration.

IV. But these many kisses meant even more than this. They revealed his father's EXCEEDING JOY. The father's heart is overflowing with gladness, and he cannot restrain his delight. I think he must have shown his joy by a *repeated look*. I will tell you the way I think the father behaved towards his son who had been dead, but was alive again, who had been lost, but was found. Let me try to describe the scene. The father has kissed his son, and he bids him sit down; then he comes in front of him, and looks at him, and feels so happy that he says, "I must give you another kiss," then he walks away a minute; but he is back again before long, saying to himself, "Oh, I must give him another kiss!" He gives him another, for he is so happy. His heart beats fast; he feels very joyful; the old man would like the music to strike up; he wants to be at the dancing; but meanwhile he satisfies himself by a repeated look at his long-lost child. Oh, I believe that God looks at the sinner, and looks at him again, and keeps on looking at him, all the while delighting in the very sight of him, when he is truly repentant, and comes back to his Father's house.

The repeated kiss meant, also, a *repeated blessing*, for every time he put his arms round him, and kissed him, he kept saying, "Bless you; oh, bless you, my boy!" He felt that his son had brought a blessing to him by coming back, and he invoked fresh blessings upon his head. Oh, sinner! If you did but know how God would welcome you, and how He would look at you, and how He would bless you, surely you would at once repent, and come to His arms and heart, and find yourself happy in His love.

The many kisses meant, also, *repeated delight*. It is a very wonderful thing that it should be in the power of a sinner to make God glad. He is the happy God, the source and spring of all happiness; what can we add to His blessedness? And yet, speaking after the manner of men, God's highest joy lies in clasping His willful Ephraims to His breast, when He has heard them bemoaning themselves, and has seen them arising and returning to their home. God grant that He may see that sight even now, and have delight because of sinners returning to Himself! Yes, we believe it shall be even so, because of His presence with us, and because of the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. Surely that is the teaching of the prophet's words: "The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over you with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over you with singing." Think of the eternal God singing, and remember that it is because a wandering sinner has returned to Him that He sings. He joys in the return of the prodigal, and all heaven shares in His joy.

V. I have not got through my subject yet. As we take a fifth look, we find that these many kisses mean OVERFLOWING COMFORT. This poor young man, in his hungry, faint, and wretched state, having come a very long way, had not much heart in him. His hunger had taken all energy out of him, and he was so conscious of his guilt that he had hardly the courage to face his father; so his father gives him a kiss, as much as to say, "Come, boy, do not be cast down; I love you."

"Oh, *the past, the past*, my Father!" he might moan, as he thought of his wasted years, but he had no sooner said that than he received another kiss, as if his father said, "Never mind the past; I have forgotten all about that." This is the Lord's way with His saved ones. Their past lies hidden under the blood of atonement. The Lord says by His servant Jeremiah, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there

shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.”

But then, perhaps, the young man looked down on his foul garments, and said, “*The present*, my father, *the present*, what a dreadful state I am in!” And with another kiss would come the answer, “Never mind the present, my Boy. I am content to have you as you are. I love you.” This, too, is God’s word to those who are “accepted in the Beloved.” In spite of all their vileness, they are pure and spotless in Christ, and God says of each one of them, “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable, and I have loved you. Therefore, though in yourself you are unworthy; through My dear Son you are welcome to My home.”

“Oh, but,” the boy might have said, “*the future*, my Father, *the future!* What would you think if I should go astray again?” Then would come another holy kiss, and his father would say, “I will see to the future, my boy; I will make home so bright for you that you will never want to go away again.” But God does more than that for us when we return to Him. He not only surrounds us with tokens of His love, but He says concerning us, “They shall be My people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.” Furthermore, He says to each returning one, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them.”

Whatever there was to trouble the son, the father gave him a kiss to set it all right; and, in like manner, our God has a love token for every time of doubt and dismay which may come to His reconciled sons. Perhaps one whom I am addressing says, “Even though I confess my sin, and seek God’s mercy, I shall still be in sore trouble, for through my sin, I have brought myself down to poverty.” “There is a kiss for you,” says the Lord: “Your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure.” “But I have even brought disease upon myself by sin,” says another. “There is a kiss for you, for I am Jehovah-Rophi, the Lord that heals you, who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.” “But I am dreadfully down at the heel,” says another. The Lord gives you also a kiss, and says, “I will lift you up and provide for all your needs. No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly.” All the promises in this Book belong to every repentant sinner, who returns to God believing in Jesus Christ, His Son.

The father of the prodigal kissed his son much, and thus made him feel happy there and then. Poor souls, when they come to Christ, are in a dreadful plight, and some of them hardly know where they are. I have known them talk a lot of nonsense in their despair, and say hard and wicked things of God in their dreadful doubt. The Lord gives no answer to all that, except a kiss, and then another kiss. Nothing puts the penitent so much at rest as the Lord’s repeated assurance of His unchanging love. Such a one the Lord has often received, “and kissed him much,” that He might fetch him up even from the horrible pit, and set his feet upon a rock, and establish his goings. The Lord grant that many whom I am addressing may understand what I am talking about!

VI. And now for our sixth head, though you will think I am getting to be like the old Puritans with these many heads. But I cannot help it, for these many kisses had many meanings: love, forgiveness, restoration, joy, and comfort were in them, and also **STRONG ASSURANCE**.

The father kissed his son much to make him quite certain that it was *all real*. The prodigal, in receiving those many kisses, might say to himself, “All this love must be true, for a little while ago I heard the hogs grunt, and now I hear nothing but the kisses from my dear father’s lips.” So his father gave him another kiss, for there was no way of convincing him that the first was real like repeating it; and if there lingered any doubt about the second, the father gave him yet a third. If, when the dream of old was doubled, the interpretation was sure, these repeated kisses left no room for doubt. The father renewed the tokens of his love that his son might be fully assured of its reality.

He did it that in the future it might *never be questioned*. Some of us were brought so low before we were converted that God gave us an excess of joy when He saved us, that we might never forget it. Sometimes the devil says to me, “You are no child of God.” I have long ago given up answering him,

for I find that it is a waste of time to argue with such a crafty old liar as he is; he knows too much for me. But if I must answer him, I say, "Why, I remember when I was saved by the Lord! I can never forget even the very spot of ground where first I saw my Savior; there and then my joy rolled in like some great Atlantic billow, and burst in mighty foam of bliss, covering all things. I cannot forget it." That is an argument which even the devil cannot answer, for he cannot make me believe that such a thing never happened. The Father kissed me much, and I remember it full well. The Lord gives to some of us such a clear deliverance, such a bright, sunshiny day at our conversion, that henceforth we cannot question our state before Him, but must believe that we are eternally saved.

The father put the assurance of this poor returning prodigal beyond all doubt. If the first kisses were given privately, when only the father and son were present, it is quite certain that, afterwards, he kissed him *before men*, where others could see him. He kissed him much in the presence of the household, that they also might not be calling in question that he was his father's child. It was a pity that the elder brother was not there also. You see he was away in the field. He was more interested in the crops than in the reception of his brother. I have known such a one in modern days. He was a man who did not come out to weekly evening services. He was such a man of business that he did not come out on a Thursday night, and the prodigal came home at such a time, and so the elder brother did not see the father receive him. If he lived now, he would probably not come to the church meetings; he would be too busy. So he would not get to know about the reception of penitent sinners. But the father, when he received that son of his, intended all to know, once for all, that he was indeed his child. Oh, that you might get these many kisses even now! If they are given to you, you will have, for the rest of your life, strong assurance derived from the happiness of your first days.

VII. I have done when I have said that I think that here we have a specimen of the INTIMATE COMMUNION which the Lord often gives to sinners when they first come to Him. "His father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him much."

You see, this was *before the family fellowship*. Before the servants had prepared the meal, before there had been any music or dancing in the family, his father kissed him. He would have cared little for all their songs, and have valued but slightly his reception by the servants, if, first of all, he had not been welcomed to his father's heart. So is it with us; we need first to have fellowship with God before we think much of union with His people. Before I go to join a church, I want my Father's kiss. Before the pastor gives me the right hand of fellowship, I want my heavenly Father's right hand to welcome me. Before I become recognized by God's people here below, I want a private recognition from the great Father above; and that He gives to all who come to Him as the prodigal came to his father. May he give it to some of you now!

This kissing, also, was *before the table communion*. You know that the prodigal was afterwards to sit at his father's table, and to eat of the fatted calf; but before that, his father kissed him. He would scarcely have been able to sit easily at the feast without the previous kisses of love. The table communion, to which we are invited, is very sweet. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, in symbol, in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, is, indeed, a blessed thing; but I want to have communion with God by the way of the kiss of love before I come there. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." This is something private, ravishing, and sweet. God give it to many of you! May you get the many kisses of your Father's mouth before you come into the church, or to the communion table!

These many kisses likewise came *before the public rejoicing*. The friends and neighbors were invited to share in the feast. But think how shamefaced the son would have been in their presence, if, first of all, he had not found a place in his father's love, or had not been quite sure of it. He would almost have been inclined to run away again. But the father had kissed him much, and so he could meet the curious gaze of old friends with a smiling face, until any unkind remarks they might have thought of making died away, killed by his evident joy in his father. It is a hard thing for a man to confess Christ if he has not had an overwhelming sense of communion with Him. But when we are lifted to the skies in the rapture God gives to us, it becomes easy, not only to face the world, but to win the sympathy of even those who might have opposed themselves. This is why young converts are frequently used to lead others into the light; the Lord's many kisses of forgiveness have so recently been given to them, that their words

catch the fragrance of divine love as they pass the lips just touched by the Lord. Alas, that any should ever lose their first love, and forget the many kisses they have received from their heavenly Father!

Lastly, all this was given *before the meeting with the elder brother*. If the prodigal son had known what the elder brother thought and said, I would not have wondered at all if he had run off, and never come back at all. He might have come near home, and then, hearing what his brother said, have stolen away again. Yes, but before that could happen, his father had given him the many kisses. Poor sinner! You have come in here, and perhaps you have found the Savior. It may be that you will go and speak to some Christian man, and he will be afraid to say much to you. I do not wonder that he should doubt you, for you are not, in yourself, as yet a particularly nice sort of person to talk to. But, if you get your Father's many kisses, you will not mind your elder brother being a little hard on you. Occasionally I hear of one who wished to join the church, saying, "I came to see the elders, and one of them was rather rough with me. I shall never come again." What a stupid man you must be! Is it not their duty to be a little rough with some of you, lest you should deceive yourselves, and be mistaken about your true state? We desire lovingly to bring you to Christ, and if we are afraid that you really have not yet come back to God, with penitence and faith, should we not tell you so, like honest men? But suppose that you have really come, and your brother is mistaken; go and get a kiss from your Father, and never mind your brother. He may remind you how you have squandered your living, painting the picture even blacker than it ought to be; but your Father's kisses will make you forget your brother's frowns. If you think that in the household of faith you will find everybody amiable, and everyone willing to help you, you will be greatly mistaken. Young Christians are often frightened when they come across some who, from frequent disappointment of their hopes, or from a natural spirit of caution, or perhaps from a lack of spiritual life, receive but coldly those upon whom the Father has lavished much love. If that is your case, never mind these cross-grained elder brethren; get another kiss from your Father. Perhaps the reason it is written, "He kissed him *much*," was because the elder brother, when he came near him, would treat him so coldly, and so angrily refuse to join in the feast.

Lord, give to many poor trembling souls the will to come to You! Bring many sinners to Your blessed feet, and while they are yet a great way off, run and meet them; fall on their neck, give them many kisses of love, and fill them to the full with heavenly delight, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke 15.

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END OF VOLUME 37.