

THE HOPE OF THE PRODIGAL SON (Lk. 15:14; Ps. 23:1)

Last Sunday evening our attention was taken to the parable of the Prodigal Son. We are not going to study the passage again, except that I would like to focus on the two-word description of how the young man ended up in the far country, **Lk. 15:14** *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

We all know the story ... how he had demanded his share of the inheritance from his father and then went off into a 'far country' where he enjoyed 'throwing his money around him' on 'riotous living'. He squandered what his father had worked hard to give him. He abandoned how he was brought up. He turned his back on how he had been taught, and he lived as he pleased.

Then, times became hard. There wasn't just *a* famine in his 'adopted' country, but there was a *mighty* famine, - the word for 'mighty' (ισχυρός) is the same word used for the 'boisterous' wind in Mt. 14:30 which terrified the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. ... As a consequence of the famine, this previously un-phased young man, - with not a care in the world, - was plunged into poverty.

At first, though, he wasn't unduly worried because he had many 'good' friends he believed he could rely on ... These were the young men he had spent his money with ... so he was in no panic.

He went to one of these friends who was willing to help him out 'until he got on his feet again', **15** *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country.* It was only temporary, and he had no thoughts of returning home because everything was going to work out. No worries, my friends will see me right! ... They are not the friends my father would have me run around with, - they are not the friends I would have had when I was living back home, - but it's my life and these are my friends now. ... And that is what is behind this interesting word which is translated "joined himself". ... The word for 'joined' (κολλάω) means 'glued' together. This was his '*friend*' 'through thick or thin', as he thought... Someone he could rely on, whose company he shared ... the kind of person he left home to be with ... And he '*fastened* himself' to this friend, - that is what the word means. They were great pals ... *at the beginning* ... as far as the prodigal son was concerned ... until this 'friend' had enough of him!

Consequently, the prodigal son had to find somewhere else ... but he had no money, no friends, no job, and no prospects. ... These 'friends' he had spent so

much time with, - and expense, - ... these 'friends' who he thought considered him as one of their own, he soon found out the cruel hard facts that they were no friends at all. ... And this person who had taken him in, - this *citizen of that country*, - sent him out into the fields to feed the pigs ... and there was no more humiliating a task than that! ... This young man who had been brought up with so much was now 'living in the gutter' ... destitute and penniless.

And do you notice he was the only one feeding the pigs? No other men belonging to that 'far country' was there with him for none of them would stoop so low. ... They drew him in and dragged him down. ... This prodigal son, who had been brought up with the very best, had been cast into the very lowest. ... And it's the last two words in verse fourteen we are considering, *when he had spent all ... he began to be in want*. ... And he realised how much he was *in want* when he looked back to those days when he remembered the goodness of his father, ¹⁷ *How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

How far away he had strayed! The signs had been there warning him ... The famine didn't happen all at once! If he was as clever as he thought he was, - he should have read the signs. However, initially, instead of returning to his father when he saw the clouds of adversity forming, he 'dug himself' further into the predicament by searching for help from his 'friend' in the foreign country. ... And do you see how *he* 'did all the running'? ¹⁵ *And he went and [he] joined himself to a citizen of that country ... He went running to his 'friend', and *he* who invited himself, - his 'friend' couldn't be bothered with him ... not really ... for when his 'friend' got 'fed up' with him *he* [*his so-called friend*] sent him into his fields to feed swine. ... That was the measure of the 'friends' he thought he had!*

The prodigal son did not get out when he should have! He remained ... and it was a decision he came to regret. He had been drinking with his friends in the up-market clubs and pubs, but when they abandoned him he ended up drinking with the swine!

In the words of the hymnwriter, he had 'tried the broken cisterns' but, to his cost, he discovered "the waters failed", and as he stooped to drink, they fled, and there in the field with the pigs, they mocked him as he wailed!

Day after day he 'stuck at it' ... trying to make it work ... because he didn't want to go home and face his father. Obviously, too, he didn't get on well with his older brother, and he didn't want to admit to him *either* he was wrong. He

couldn't do it! How could he bear the disgrace? ... How could he bear to see the disappointment on his father's face?! ... So, he stayed, and he tried to make it work, but *eventually* he had to admit, "I can do this no longer. I must return",

I've wandered far away from God,
The paths of sin too long I've trod,
I'm tired of sin and straying, Lord ...
My soul is sick, my heart is sore ...
Lord, I'm coming home

When a Christian turns away from God, they begin, - as it were, - the journey into a 'far country'. It is a country where they don't 'speak' the same 'language', they don't have the same rules, they don't think the same ... and to live in that 'foreign country' you need to endorse their principles. ... And when the Christian turns away and leaves God behind, God is no longer their priority and they start to think they can do well on their own, without Him. He is in the past ... and they have moved on. They now have a new lifestyle, new friends, new pursuits, and a whole new set of priorities, *without God*.

This young man deserved to be left with the pigs, - the world says, "you make your bed, you lie in it! ... But he knew there was a father who loved him and who was waiting for him back home. He knew his father had never given up on him ... and he knew his father loved him.

There are many people who have professed faith in Christ, - they have 'prayed the prayer', and for a while they seemed to have 'walked the walk and talked the talk' ... but they left it behind for it didn't really mean anything to them. That's because it was only a shallow profession, rather than a solid possession. But here is this young man, - despite what he had done, - he knew he was his father's son. ... He knew his father loved him and continued to love him.

When you are truly saved, and even when you do 'wander into the far country', you have a Heavenly Father Who never stops loving you, and you never stop being His child. ... You might 'run with the lads' and be one of them ... but if you know Christ as your Saviour, you'll never fit in. Try as hard as you may, even though you tell yourself you are enjoying the 'far country', you know, - in the depths of your soul, - you are a foreigner, an outsider, and it is not the place for you. ... Here is why that is ... It is because you are a child of the King, - your citizenship belongs in another 'country' ... and deep inside you know it, and you also know wandering away from God will never satisfy you. ... This

young man, **Lk. 15:14** when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be *in want*. ... He had nothing left to fight with.

Consider what was waiting for him back home. ... In the field in the foreign country, he had been *starving* into the trough *starving*, but when he returned to the farm, and to his father's table, he was restored and *satisfied*. He had been in the muck and the mire ... in rags, but when he came home, he had a new robe to wear, and the ring from his father's treasure chest was put on his finger, and new sandals on his feet, and a great feast prepared for him ... No more *in want*, but now in *wealth* for he had been restored by the grace of his loving father.

Now let's go to another part of Scripture ... where the swine are replaced with the sheep ... The psalmist declared, **The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not *want***. ... What a contrast to the prodigal son! David, on the other hand, was *wanting* for nothing. ... And neither was the prodigal son when he returned to his father, **3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

When the Lord saves you, it means He chose you for Himself because He loves you. You are His precious child, but when He sees you heading off 'into a far country', it is not where He desired you to go. However, you are a person and not a robot, - you have your own feelings and desires and stubbornness, - and if you decide to wander, He often allows it ... but while you are away, He doesn't stop loving you. He doesn't stop knowing where you are. You don't stop being precious to Him because you are His child for whom He gave His Son to die on Calvary ... And that means He has invested in you His saving grace. He has sealed you with an indelible mark. You are His, and when you try to enjoy the world, it will inevitably disappoint you ... maybe not immediately, *but it will!*

It is a precarious predicament to be in ... wandering away from God. Maybe you *are* away from Him at this time, but nobody knows, - you are managing to hide it ... You need to return. Your journey to the 'far country' will do you no good ... but when you return to the Father, He will restore you and your testimony again will be, **The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want**. ... And you will find Him taking you again down to the green pastures, - not to the muck and gutters where the swine are ... but the lush meadows enjoyed by the sheep. You will take pleasure in Him again leading you along the still waters and the tranquil paths of righteousness. ... There will undoubtedly be times when you will pass through dark valleys ... but you will have the Light with you which cannot be extinguished. And whereas the young man had nobody with him when he was feeding the pigs, *you* have your Saviour's promise that He will never leave you

nor forsake you. And in the midst of any opposition which comes your way, never forget you are a child of the King for He has anointed your head with oil ... And like the young man who returned to his father, the Lord's storehouse contains all you need, for your Heavenly Father promises His goodness and mercy will remain with you throughout life and until the day He takes you home to be with Himself forever.

I must have the Saviour with me
For I dare not go alone,
I must feel His presence near me,
And His arm around me thrown.

I must have the Saviour with me,
And His eye the way must guide,
Till I reach the vale of Jordan,
Till I cross the rolling tide.