

THE FATHERS LOVE - Sunday April 15th 2012

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'" Luke 15:11-32

Beloved in the Lord,

This parable of Jesus illustrates for us the meaning of Easter in a very real and tangible way. Jesus shows us the Father's heart. He shows us how the love of God works. The parable of the prodigal son demonstrates for us the great heart of God; the power of His love and His readiness to forgive us. God is a patient and loving Father, who seeks the lost son, who forgives and accepts us as we are; and rejoices over every sinner who repents. Although this

parable is nearly always entitled “The parable of the Prodigal son” , I think it could be called “The Father’s love.” As we study this parable closely, we find that in reality it is more about the Father than the son. It gives us an insight into the heart of God the Father.

Jesus tells us about a father who had two sons. The youngest son was feeling restless. He is no longer happy living at home, and feels the call of the world. He decides to ask his father for the unthinkable – for his share of the inheritance. This was an outrageous thing to even consider, as his father was still alive. His father could have said no way, and even punished him for his insolence in asking for such a thing, yet he didn’t. The father knew what was most likely going to happen, yet because he loved his son, he didn’t want to force him to stay against his will. He took his wealth and divided it between his two sons. He knew full well, that his youngest would now definitely leave home, as he had the means to do so. The father did not want his son to go, but he also did not want to him to stay against his will.

Here we have a beautiful insight into God’s heart. God does not force anyone of us to stay with Him and live for Him, to serve Him against our will. He desires for us to do so, but gives us a free choice, a free will.

Having received a sizeable amount of money the younger boy leaves home. It doesn’t take very long for him to find bad company. His father was wealthy and so he had a sizeable amount of cash. He began to live wickedly and to squander his father’s money; in fact he spent every last cent. Having gained freedom from his father, he went for it. For a while he basked in the sunshine of sin and was having a good time, but then the clouds rolled in and the sky became dark and gloomy.

We read that a famine arose in the land and food became very scarce. The realities of life suddenly hit him. While he had money, he had plenty of friends; but where were they all now, that he was broke? They didn’t even seem to recognise him, or remember his name anymore.

He looks for employment and eventually gets a job on a farm feeding pigs. See how low he has come. For a Jew, a pig was an unclean animal. To touch a pig was unthinkable. He has fallen so far, that even the pig’s food looks good to him, but he can’t even have that. The mind that was clouded by loose living, by sinful indulgence, slowly begins to clear. **“But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!(verse 17)**

His father, who used to seem to him to be strict and authoritarian, now begins to take on a new light. In the father’s house, even the servants were better off, than he was now. Sure, the servants had to work hard, but at least they were well feed and looked after.

He hatches a plan to return home. He cannot for one moment hope that his father would receive him back as a son, but maybe as a servant? He knew that he deserved to be totally

rejected, but maybe....He knew that he was no longer worthy to bear his father's name, but possibly he could be a slave.

It is interesting that a person who has come low in life knows his or her unworthiness. That is why it is much easier to convert a vile sinner to God, than a self righteous person.

He now makes a decision: ***"I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."***

While this is going on, let us see what the father has been doing. He has been patiently, but hopefully waiting for his son to come home. We read in verse 20: ***"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."***

My friends that is love, pure and simple. The fact that the father saw him from a long way off tells us that he was looking out for him. Every day he looked out down the dusty road, waiting, praying, hoping. Maybe today.....

God is waiting. He is seeking and calling. As soon as a sinner shows any inkling to come to Him, God moves Heaven and Earth to bring them home. You see not only is God waiting, He runs to meet us.

One bright happy day, the father has gone out to look as he had so many times before. There he is. His son. His clothes are dirty and tattered, he's unshaven and unkempt. He is slouching, head hanging low, eyes to the ground, yet he is coming home. What a sight. Contrast it to the day he left, with his pockets full of money, arrogant and self confident, a smile on his face.

What to do? Scold and berate him? Tell him he is a useless, no hoper, good for nothing son? Should he be cold and aloof? Should he make him suffer some shame, at least for a while?

No way. The father's heart is bursting with love for his son. He runs to meet him. In those days, dignified, powerful, wealthy men, did not run! He threw his dignity to the wind, to get to his son. Where the son should be grovelling at his father's feet, we see the father embracing him, kissing him, holding him, crying tears of joy.. The father humbled himself. Can you feel his love, his joy. My son, my son!

The son begins to stammer out what he had gone over in his mind so many times: ***"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."***

He gets no further than these words. We read the father is already giving orders to the servants: ***Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24***

***for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’
And they began to celebrate.***

It is vital that we understand what has happened here. The father has totally and completely forgiven his son and reinstated him into the family with absolute privilege and power. Wow. He ordered that he be clothed in the best robe. This is a symbol of righteousness. When God receives us through Jesus, than our old filthy rags are exchanged for a robe of righteousness. We have a right standing before God. We are justified – just as if I had never sinned. We are given a white robe, clean and pure washed in Jesus blood.

A ring is placed on his finger. This is authority to trade in the father’s name. The ring was like a stamp or seal. Giving his son the ring, the father has given him power over his monies. Power to use the father’s name. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour than He gives us authority to use His name. The power is in His name.

Sandals are provided for his feet. This is a sign of belonging, reinstatement into the family. The servants went barefoot.

Do you see what happened. The father completely forgave his son, all his sins, and reinstated him into the family with full authority. That my beloved friend s is what God our Father does when we come to Him. When we come, no matter how sinful we maybe, His love pours out.

The punishment for sin, the wrath of God for sin was poured out upon Jesus on Good Friday. He took our punishment so that we may be forgiven. He shed His blood for our forgiveness. So great is the Father’s love for us.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Did the son ever entertain thoughts about leaving the father again. No way. Having come from the pig pen, he now lived thankfully, joyfully, and lovingly with his father, serving him and obeying him.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.