

## Behold the Love of the Father

When February rolls around, and thoughts of Valentine's Day and all that accompanies it comes to mind, it is perhaps a good time to be reminded of the extremely obvious: the incredible love of God for us!

It is one thing to know and confess His love for us, so awesomely demonstrated by the bitter sufferings and sacrifice of His own dear Son for our salvation and life, but to truly grasp the depth and meaning of that love for us can be so critical to our daily well-being amidst our afflictions and struggles in this world, and particularly our own sense of acceptance and well-being (who we are in Jesus).

I believe one of the best illustrations and reminders of this love is in our Lord's familiar and beloved parable of the Prodigal Son, or what could be better named: The Loving Father. We are quite familiar with the account and the shocking request of the youngest son for his inheritance (basically saying he wants his father dead so he can have what is "his"), as well as his subsequent squandering of his inheritance on wild, sinful living, to where he was left in the most desperate straits of even longing to eat the slop of the pigs he was tasked with feeding (couldn't be a lower of lows for a Jewish boy than that!).

In that lowest of conditions, he comes to his senses and realizes that even the servants in his father's house are well fed and provided for. Mindful of his father's character, and though he knows that he has thrown away his sonship, and that in no way could he be considered a son, he could beg for forgiveness and perhaps serve in his father's house. He begins to rehearse what he would say to his father as he headed back home.

Yet then the startling love of the father should strike all! While the wayward son is still far off, the father sees him in the distance -- which means he was looking for him! Waiting for him, longing for and watching for his son's return.

In fact, before the son reaches home the Father RUNS to him (which no eastern man would so humiliate himself by doing so) and embraces him. The son confesses: (Luke 15:21-24) *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."* (22) *But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet."* All signs of sonship! Though the son in his shame thought his sonship was over, his father in love shows him otherwise and restores him.

In his book "The Care of Souls", Pastor Harold Senkbeil writes: "Guilt is tied to the sinful things I've done; shame is the continuous experience of utter remorse over who I am." We know the sin we commit against our Lord and those in our lives. And we can confess those sins, knowing our forgiveness in Jesus. But we can struggle even more with WHO we are. The shame, the stigma of our sin hangs over us. (And even when sin has been committed against us, we again can feel and struggle with shame). The devil can be relentless in his accusations against us -- we can doubt who we are in Christ. But behold the loving character of your Father! Never does He stop watching for you. Never does He stop loving you. Even when you are far off (having wandered in your sin), He looks for you, calling you back to Himself through His Word.

In those times when we can be overcome with shame, our ears and hearts echoing with the accusing voice of the devil, behold how the Father runs to you, embraces you in His loving arms. How He has clothed you with the robe of His own Son Jesus' righteousness in your baptism and shod you with the shoes of a Child of the Father. Be assured that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! Clothed in Christ through faith in His blessed work, you are a holy, righteous beloved child of God no matter what the devil may say, or even what you may say of yourself. Behold the Love of your Father!

Pastor