

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the blood of God's own Son,

When I was a boy of 12, I belonged to a Lutheran congregation of 6,000 members – a “mega church” in its day. One Sunday evening as a friend of mine and I were standing on the steps of this church, he told me that his father no longer came to church very much because the pastor was always asking for money in his sermons. I have never forgotten that remark.

To this very day, because so many pastors talk so much about money from the pulpit, and so many of their church members complain about it, I confess to being reluctant to bring the matter up. However, the giving of ourselves and our possessions to the Lord is surely taught in the Bible in many places. We have a new budget for this year. The suggestion was made at last Sunday's voters' meeting that we may want to increase our budget by another \$3,000, because of the needs and opportunities presented by our church body.

But there is no need for the pastors of our church body to pound the pulpit to extract offerings from our people. There is no need among us to send a stewardship committee into each home to badger our people regarding their offerings for the Lord's work. *The giving that is acceptable to God is one of the fruits of a living faith in Christ. Every time the Gospel of Christ is preached, it is a lesson on giving taught by God.*

Our text is the most famous biblical illustration of the *forgiving* love of our heavenly Father. A Father's love gave an **“inheritance”** to his son, probably in the form of money. But our heavenly Father has given us an inheritance that far surpasses all the riches of the world! Rust does not destroy it! Moths cannot corrupt it, and no government can take it away from us in taxes!

Our heavenly inheritance is always greater than anything we can dream about or imagine. Your Father and mine wants us to live with Him forever in the mansions of heaven. That we should have such an eternal inheritance in heaven is absolutely impossible, *except for*

one thing:

GOD'S LOVE GOES OUT OF THE WAY.

I.

Suppose that you were going to adopt a son to be your heir. What would you want him to be like? Loving, thankful, considerate of others, responsible? Which of us would choose someone like the Prodigal Son? But think of how much we are like him! Do we ever become tired of our position in life? Do we envy what the world is able to with its money and possessions? Have we rebelled against our Father's will in order to run with the world?

Surely we have the same sinful heart the Prodigal son had. By nature we all have wasted our Father's inheritance in so many ways! We certainly are NOT children who deserve to be called "**heirs**" of our Father in heaven!

Still, ***the Father's love went out of the way to adopt us!*** He "**so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son**" to suffer the punishment of our sins in our places. In addition to taking away our sins, God applied the perfect righteous life of Christ to the whole world, so that we ALL might stand before Him in purity.

Still, like the prodigal son, even when we and the rest of the world hear the Gospel of love and grace in Christ, we do not run to embrace it. As we said last Sunday, we do NOT find it within our fallen selves to "choose" to embrace our Savior. Left to our fallen selves not a single one of us here today would believe the "foolish" preaching of Christ crucified and risen for the salvation of sinners.

But one again, ***God's love went out of the way*** to overcome our natural resistance to the Gospel, so that we might believe its saving message. As Paul wrote to Titus: "**According to His (God's) mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing**" worked by "**the Holy Spirit.**" (*Titus 3:5*) We possess an eternal inheritance with Christ because our God went "***out of the way***" to adopt us as His children and heirs!

II.

But the prodigal son took his father's inheritance for granted. The world beckoned to him with its crooked finger. He found it far more exciting and pleasurable than remaining under the influence of his father. So he went out to taste all the pleasures the world had to offer.

Don't we also take our heavenly Father's inheritance for granted at times? Too often, the pastures of the world seem greener, more pleasurable than the pasture of God's Word, don't they? Think about it. Let us ask ourselves whether the prodigal son needed to repent of his sins against his father, *while we do not*.

It is true that, like the prodigal son, God does allow some to *bottom out* in the pig sties of this world, while others He returns before they get to that point. But whether we are one or the other, ***divine love still goes out of the way to work an out of the way repentance.***

Verse 17 tells us that the prodigal son "**came to himself**" – He came to his spiritual senses, repenting of his sins. His was a true repentance. He no longer blamed anyone else, but confessed his own fault. He asked for mercy. He turned back and OUT of the way he had been going.

Notice that his repentance was not about "making a deal" with his father. There is not a word or a thought about covering up his sin or making excuses of any kind. Neither does his repentance arise from fear. It was *the remembrance of his father's LOVE that caused the repentance and return of the prodigal.*

So it is with us, whenever we truly repent of our sins against our heavenly Father. This is not our work, but the work of our loving God who reminds us of the inheritance that *is still waiting for us*. Our repentance is the work of Him Who reminds us through the Gospel that the door of His mercy *remains wide open* because of the already shed blood of His crucified Son!

III.

And after our Father's love has gone out of the way to adopt us in Christ and to work true repentance, does He then ask some kind of *penance* from us, in order to work off the penalty of our sins? Does

he want us to do like one pastor did in Colorado, who whenever his church needed money he would visit a wealthy woman in the congregation, who never came to church? Or when we have confessed that we are not worthy to be His son or daughter, does He say: "*You've got that right!*"? Does He disinherit us as we deserve?

No! Rather, our God does as the father in this parable: *He RUNS to embrace us!* He commands His servants to put on us His "**best robe**" – the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ! He assures us that we are STILL no less than heirs of heaven, and "**joint rulers with Christ.**" He prepares a feast for us by giving us the very body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar!

Now what should all of this ***out of the way love*** of our Father bring forth from us? – an ***out of the way thanksgiving!*** It is the nature of God's love from heaven that when it is given and received by His believing children, love *returns* to Him. So John says in his first letter: "**We love Him because He first loved us.**" (*1John 4:19*) When we really appreciate a gift, are we not willing to go ***out of the way*** for the one who gave it?

Recently, I met an aged Christian who expressed her frustration with those who claim to be Christians, but *never do anything to show that they are*. Such people, no matter how religious they may seem, are *thankless and unbelieving*. They are like nine out of the ten lepers Jesus healed, who did not return to give thanks to God.

God's love went out of the way for us! Are we going out of our way to sit at the feet of our Savior and hear His saving Word? Are we going out of our way to show that we appreciate the eternal inheritance we have received from our Father in heaven? When we want to show our thankfulness, we do not just give away what we don't want any longer, do we? Did the Father's love for us sacrifice a "*leftover*" Son, or the Son He no longer wanted? What sacrifices are we willing to make in our service to God *whose love went out of the way?*

In the parable of the prodigal son Jesus does not tell us how many times the prodigal thanked His father for his love and forgiving mercy. Nor does Jesus tell us how many *ways* the forgiven one

showed his thankfulness to his father for his inheritance. Surely it is enough if the Holy Spirit grants us grace to remember and rejoice ***in God's love that goes out of the way!*** . . .

By the way, in a few minutes our heavenly Father runs to embrace us with His enduring love in the Supper of His Son. May we receive His embrace with humble, thankful hearts! Amen.