

The Savior's compassion

Ponder in your hearts the feelings of the Savior as He expresses His love for each child of God:

"They were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.

"And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you.

"Have ye any that are . . . afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you. . . .

". . . I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you" (3 Nephi 17:5-8).

I pray that our faith may be sufficient for each of us to feel encircled in the arms of our Savior's love. I know that our Savior lives and that He intimately knows each of us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Bruce D. Porter

Our similarities to the prodigal son

The parable of the prodigal son is a parable of us all. It reminds us that we are, in some measure, prodigal sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven. For, as the Apostle Paul wrote, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Like the errant son of the Savior's parable, we have come to "a far country" (Luke 15:13) separated from our pre-mortal home. Like the prodigal, we share in a divine inheritance, but by our sins we squander a portion thereof and experience a "mighty famine" (v. 14) of spirit. Like him, we learn through painful experience that worldly pleasures and pursuits are of no more worth than the husks of corn that swine eat. We yearn to be reconciled with our Father and return to His home.

How long we have wandered
As strangers in sin,
And cried in the desert for thee!
["Redeemer of Israel," *Hymns*, no. 6]

The Father's Eldest Son redeemed us

In the parable of the prodigal son, only the eldest son remains true to his father; in his own words, "Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment"

(Luke 15:29). Similarly, in the plan of salvation the Firstborn of the Father is sinless and without spot. Yet there is a vital difference. In the parable, the eldest son is jealous of the attention paid to the returning prodigal. In the plan of salvation, however, the Eldest Son *makes possible* the return of the prodigals.

The Father sends Him forth to redeem His sons and daughters from bondage. The Eldest is filled with compassion. "I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them" (Ezekiel 37:23). He journeys the long distance to find and bring home the prodigal ones. And there He finds us weary, hungry, and downtrodden. He feeds us and gives us drink. He lives among us and shares our burdens. Then, in a final act of supreme love, the Eldest Son takes of His own wealth and, one by one, He ransoms us. In order to pay the fulness of our debt, He is compelled to sacrifice His own fortune, yea, all that He has, every whit.

There are those who refuse the proffered ransom. Chained by pride, they prefer bondage to repentance. But those who accept of His offering and forsake their errant ways receive healing at His hands and liberty as His gift. These He leads back to the Father with songs of everlasting joy.

I testify that the Eldest Son of our Father in Heaven did redeem us from the bondage of sin. We are a purchased people. In the words of Paul, "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 7:23). In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Firstborn of the Father "descended below all things" (D&C 88:6); He bore "our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). At Golgotha, at the hands of men for whose very sins He had atoned, He "poured out his soul unto death" (v. 12), freely relinquishing His life as He overcame the world.

The Savior's sacrifices

In the premortal realm He had been the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Creator of the earth, the great I AM. From these exalted heights He descended, coming to earth in the most humble of circumstances that He might be no stranger to our sorrows. Instead of worldly station, He chose to be born in a lowly stable and live the simple life of a carpenter. He grew up in an obscure village in a despised precinct of Palestine. He made himself of no reputation, and was "a root out of a dry ground," having "no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2).

He might have had political power and honor; He chose instead to be a healer and a teacher. He might have won the favor of His people by freeing them from Roman oppression; instead, He saved them from their sins and was rejected by His own. He sacrificed the glory of Galilee to experience the humiliation and trial of Jerusalem. Then, in a most literal way, the Lord Jesus Christ paid the utmost demands of our ransom as He bore "the pain of all men" (D&C 18:11).

"And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him,

and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men" (1 Nephi 19:9).

Redeemer of Israel

A few years ago I visited Jerusalem shortly before Christmas. The streets were cold and dreary; there was political tension in the air. Yet peace filled my heart to know that this was the city He loved so much, the very place of His eternal sacrifice; to know that here had lived He who was the Savior of all mankind.

I returned to the United States late on a Saturday evening. When the Sabbath dawned, my alarm awoke me to these words from "O Holy Night":

The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials born to be our friend.
[Adolphe Adam, in *Recreational Songs* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1949), pp. 142-44]

And I began to weep as I contemplated the perfect life and glorious sacrifice of the Redeemer of Israel—He who was born the friend of the lowly and hope of the meek.

I bear testimony that the Lord Jesus Christ has paid the price of our sins upon condition of repentance. He is the Firstborn of the Father. He is the Holy One of Israel. He is the firstfruits of the Resurrection. I testify that He lives. I testify that He is in very deed "our only delight, . . . our King, our Deliv'rer, our all!" (*Hymns*, no. 6). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Thank you, Brother Zwick and Brother Porter of the Seventy.

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Council of the Twelve will now speak to us.