

Let's Travel the Heavenly Path Together

By Tim Childs

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Our Father has prepared a city for you and me, too. Through eyes of faith, we also can see it just ahead in the distance. We, too, acknowledge we are pilgrims here. This world is not our home, and this is something we want to be mindful of each day of our sojourn.

God has reserved heaven for those of us who have placed no one and nothing before him. Having God first-place in our lives is to put the things of God first in our lives. Jesus taught that his disciples would set themselves apart from those who are worldly minded. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

God has reserved heaven for those who love him. We show God whether our love for him is truly genuine in the daily choices we make. When we love the Father, as he wants us to, we are willing to walk in his way known as the “path of righteousness.” We will want to obey the commands he has given through love.

Sometimes It Takes a Pigpen!

By Dean Kelly

I went to an area Gospel Meeting last night and heard a lesson on the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). As I listened I could not help but think: Sometimes it Takes a Pigpen. You remember that this young Jewish man wound up feeding pigs, and even desiring their food. As the speaker said, I don't think you could sink any lower as a Jewish man than to have to even be around pigs, much less take care of them. And on top of that, the pigs were being well fed while he starved.

The other day I was listening to the commentators on an Atlanta Braves broadcast. They were talking about interviewing Terry Pendleton, who is the Braves hitting coach. They asked him how he got the players to listen to him about their hitting. After all, most of these men have played baseball as long as they can remember. They have been successful in little league, Babe Ruth, High School and sometimes in college. They have been batting like they do and don't relish the idea of being told how to bat. His response was, “They have to hit rock bottom before they will listen to me.” Yep, sometimes it takes a pigpen.

The young man had demanded that his father give him his inheritance, and he had gone off and spent it in wild living. We all know the story. It is hard, especially in youth, to look down through the days to come and realize the consequences of our actions. We all like instant gratification. I

want what I want and I want it now! I don't stop and think about what that means about tomorrow. And that is why it is a fact that sometimes it takes a pigpen.

I might slightly disagree with the speaker I heard (a very minor disagreement), but I don't believe that the prodigal's older brother actually knew where he went. It is my personal opinion (though I would not debate it as fact) that the older brother's accusations against his brother, even though they were accurate, were a reflection of what he would have done had he left, rather than of knowledge that he had of his brother's actions. Do you realize that in this parable the only one that is left in an unsafe position at the end is the older brother? Sometimes I wonder if some folks don't need to find themselves in the pigpen to realize what they have. We can be so ungrateful for the blessings that we have, and so caught up in those things that we lose our concern for others. This older brother became hateful and childish, and felt sorry for himself. Maybe he needed a little while in the pigpen to truly appreciate what his father had done for him.

One of our jobs, in the church, as parents, as friends and as brethren is to try to help others realize where they are and where they are headed, to try to keep them from winding up in the pigpen. We can avoid the pigpen. It takes careful thought on our part. It takes recognition of the possible consequences of our own actions. We must listen to the inspired advice and counsel of the apostle Paul to the young man and preacher, Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12); and again, "Flee youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

We don't want to see anyone that we love starving in the pigpen. Obviously, like with this young man, it is going to happen. Let us do all we can to avoid it, and to help keep our children, our friends and our brethren from the pigpen. And then, when one of us does wind up in the pigpen, and finally comes to his/her senses, let us welcome that person back with open arms and hearts. After all, the only time that God is pictured as running in the Scriptures is to welcome back his wayward child.

Please be careful and don't leave God, but we know sometimes it takes a pigpen.