



THE JOY OF THE LORD
PART ONE

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Please read Luke 15:11-32 (The parable of the two sons.) This parable is also known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. Most sermons about this parable refer to the son who left as the Prodigal Son. Let's start there, with his departure. *And he said, A certain man had two sons: ¹²And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. ¹³And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* (Luke 15:11-13 KJV)

Many things seem right or satisfying at the time, but later prove to be otherwise. This young man said, "OK, I'll ask my Dad to give me my inheritance; that money belongs to me." Our heavenly Father has given us an inheritance of certain blessings, wanting us to continue to live in blessing, but at times we turn them into curses. How? This young man received his part of the inheritance and said, "Good, now I can leave. I've got enough money. **Why would I want to stay here in my Father's house?** I can get away from here and have some fun with this money." Taken outside of the boundaries of God's love and of relationship with him, blessings become curses.

God has given us an inheritance to steward over, both spiritual and material. For example those who are married and have children, are stewards over their family. The question is, how are we stewarding over our family, the treasure God has given us? The Bible says that children are an inheritance from the Lord (Psalm 127:3.) They are our inheritance. We have to look after that inheritance, learn to steward over it, and be faithful with it. Our children will follow in our footsteps. If we are faithful, our children will have a heritage of reality, truth and love that they will be able to draw from when they are older—even if at the present they seem to be rejecting it.

So we must consider how we are stewarding over the inheritance God has given us. Husbands and wives, your home; single people, the gifts that God has given you. Jesus spoke of a man who received five talents, and invested them to produce five more. Here in this parable, the young man threw away what he had received, living for his own desires. There's a huge difference between the man who received five talents and multiplied them, and the one who received an inheritance and began to live selfishly.

So the young man leaves. He says, "Great, I'm going to make the most of what I have so I can enjoy life." He didn't understand that to enjoy life, we need more than money. **We learn to enjoy life when Christ is in us, and we surrender ourselves completely to Him.** We are blessed as this happens! God doesn't bless us so we can spend his blessings on things that aren't going to edify us. On the contrary, He blesses us to expand His kingdom and to bring glory to Himself.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. ¹⁵And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. The young man's money ran out, and he found himself miserable. I imagine that when he had money, he also had many friends to enjoy himself with. But the money had to run out at some point. In Honduras we have a saying, "You're worth whatever you have. If you don't have anything, you're not worth anything."

**BEING JOYFUL
AND OPEN WITH
OTHERS DOESN'T
MAKE YOU LESS
SPIRITUAL.**

That's what happened to this young man. Speaking of people who don't know the Lord, I know some who have had many friends when their pockets have been full. But then the money goes, so do the friends. It's not like that in the Lord. Things are different with Him. Even in the middle of the most difficult situations, He's always with us, our best friend. He's not going to abandon us.

**SETTLE BACK
INTO THE
SIMPLICITY OF
JESUS CHRIST.**

Imagine how hungry he was, wanting to eat the pigs' husks. It says no-one gave them to him, precisely because they were for pigs. We have a loving and faithful heavenly Father, who provides us with comforts in life, but we leave the comforts and security of his house to experiment with the world; its thinking and its ways. I know young Christians who say, "No, I haven't really lived life yet, why should I follow the Lord? I'll do that when I'm older. I'm still so young, and following God is for older people." But they come to experience similar things to this young man. Having separated themselves from the Lord, they begin to have big problems. But while there's breath, there's hope, and this young man still had a hope. Many people are lost, but while they're alive, there's still hope. They need us to go and share the word of God with them so they can come and see that there is a loving Father who cares for them also.

It's sad to see a person who, having been blessed by our Father God, ends up miserable because he didn't allow himself to be led by the Spirit of God and learn to steward over what he had received from God. Some people say, "The devil stole from me what God had given me." I want to correct that. Let me say that the devil cannot take away what God has given you. At times we give it to him with our own hand. If anyone can give power and authority to the devil, it's us. A young man at work said, "Do you know why the devil is so famous? Because we make him famous." We say, "Ah, you've got to be careful of the devil because he's a tempter, he's cunning, he's this and he's that..." and we speak so little of the great love of God in us, of the verse that says that He who lives in us is more powerful than he who is in the world. Why should we make the devil so famous? When people speak like that, I tell them, "Don't worry, that devil isn't really important, there's Someone who's more powerful, and He's who really matters." The devil can't take away what God has given you. At times we willingly give it to him. He doesn't have authority in himself to come and take it.

You may say, "Yes, but the devil stole from Job..." But who gave him permission? **If God doesn't give him permission, the devil can't do anything; it's as simple as that.** Don't worry, God has given you an inheritance to enjoy; the devil can't take it away, and you mustn't throw it away. The devil doesn't have an inherent right to steal anything that God has given you. He can't take away your joy, peace, patience, love, your faith. If you fall ill, he can't take away your joy, because the Bible says that God is your healer, and you can stand on that word. When problems come into your life, he can't take away your joy, because the Bible says that one of the fruits of the Spirit who lives in us is patience. The Bible says that the devil can't even take away the love you have for the Lord and for others, because if we abide in God, we abide in love. Let's refer everything back to the Word of God. If we stand on the word of God in our situation, the devil won't be able to steal from us.

The devil didn't steal the young man's inheritance from him. He lost it through his own neglect, through not stewarding over it. Later, he remembers where came from, that he had everything when he was in his Father's house. I imagine he was like a master who could command his father's servants to do certain tasks for him. But now he himself is like a servant.

But he came to a place of repentance. It's so good when we come to repentance, come willing to humble ourselves before the Lord, to ask his forgiveness, recognizing that without Him we can do nothing. When we return from our forays into the world's ways and thinking, and settle back into the simplicity of Jesus Christ.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, ¹⁹And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

What would be your attitude if a child of yours left home like this young man, and after a time he returned in a humble spirit and said, "Dad, forgive me that I left you, forgive me for what I've done."? If you saw in him a repentance from the heart? Hopefully yours would be the same attitude that this father had when he saw his son. At times our children make mistakes, but they are still our children. Obviously there are things they learn from discipline and through consequences. This young man faced the consequences of his actions: he got to a place of absolute inability to help himself, he couldn't cope anymore and he said, "I'm going back to my Father." He must have walked a long way to get back to his father's house. It's so good when we repent from the heart and come back and seek our father's forgiveness.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: ²And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2) This is our loving Father! When we miss the mark and go our own way, He's waiting at the door of the house, watching for our return. I imagine that this father was often there, looking to the horizon to see when his son might appear. Because even when we have been estranged from our children and they've left home unreconciled to us, deep down we want to see them again. Just like this father with his son.

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. ²¹And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. When he was back with the pigs, he decided what he would say to his father on his return, and those are exactly the words that he spoke when he returned.

One of the disciples once said to Jesus, "Lord, look how many people are leaving you because of what you're preaching!" And the Lord said, "Why, do you want to leave as well?" And one of the disciples wisely responded, "Lord, where would we go? Only you have the words of eternal life." (John 6:66-68) That's what happened with this young man. Where else would he go? He was going to find mercy and love with his Father. So he returned repentant. It's the same for us too, where would we go, since only He has the words of eternal life? We may play with the idea of giving up, of trying something else, but honestly, where would we go? Only He has the words of eternal life. It's our responsibility to listen and to obey; to walk honorably with our Father.

How did the father respond to his son's return? *But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: ²³And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: ²⁴For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.* He was full of joy, because the boy had returned. There was a great party. There's always joy in heaven when someone comes to the Lord (Luke 15:7) What happened in that house? It says there was a PARTY. There was joy because the son had returned. And what does the Lord say? That there is joy in heaven when someone repents and comes to Him. When I came to the Lord, there was a party in heaven. When you came to the Lord, there was a party in heaven. If you've not yet come to the Lord, when you do, there will be a party in heaven! I think that heaven is like a constant party, because God has sent so many people to evangelize, that more than one person accepts Christ every day, and I say, God loves to party! Glory to God! We have a joyful God, not a dull, tedious, overly serious God! That should be a reason for us to be joyful!

Being joyful and open with others doesn't make you less spiritual. At times we confuse being spiritual with being solemn and serious. There was a Pastor who was demanding, serious and over scrupulous, both in and outside the church. He used to say, "My children must pray X number of times a day, and they must fast with me." He was so serious that nobody could get him to smile. And he had raised his children just like him. He would say, "You children must be upright. No laughing in the street or anything like that..." And one day as he evangelized in a certain neighborhood, Bible in hand, he took his little six year old son with him. They saw a Bulldog, which has a very serious facial expression. The little child said to his father, "Daddy, Daddy, look, I want to show you something! Look, a **Christian dog!**" At once the father understood, and he said, "Lord, forgive me for having been so blind for so long. You've spoken to me through this little child." Sometimes we are just too serious. Meanwhile God is partying in heaven, full of joy over the return of His wayward children. Glory to God!

**LOOK DADDY,
A CHRISTIAN
DOG!**

Let's go on. It says there was a party, like there is when someone repents. Now we will get to the point I want to make. As I said at the beginning, most of the time, sermons deal with the younger son, his attitude, his misery, his repentance. But what about the older brother? I want us to focus on him. Not the prodigal son who left. Rather, the prodigal son who stayed at home. His attitude leads some theologians to call him the Pharisee, but let's look at him ourselves.

**WE WORK SO
HARD THAT WE
REFUSE TO
RECEIVE THE
BLESSING.**

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. ²⁷And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. ²⁸And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. An over-serious attitude. A man who tried too hard. It says he was working in the field and the sound of a party in the house surprised him. At times we try so hard, that our striving in our work, our slavery to what we think we should be doing, doesn't allow us to see with our spiritual eyes the great things that God has for us to enjoy in our homes. We are in God's family, in His house. We are children of the owner of the gold and the silver; sons of the Most High God. **But there's something in the way, something that doesn't allow us to enjoy the blessings God has for us in our home with Him.** And at times we try so hard, we work so hard, that we refuse to receive the blessing, saying to ourselves, "No, I am too busy." Too busy working and trying and striving, too busy to enjoy the blessing God has given us.

I was so glad when once a brother told me, "I used to work for the Lord with my hands, but not my heart.. But God taught me to work with my heart." At times we say, "God needs me to sort this or that out, (for example) we need to build a beautiful church or do this wonderful project, because God wants only the best..." We worry and work so much that we forget to do it with our heart, and this means we can't see the great things God wants to do, and the great things He has for us to enjoy. And so we don't see them and we don't enjoy them.

Why didn't the older brother rejoice that his younger brother had returned? Did he think that his brother had come to steal his part of the inheritance? "Ah, he's come back to take what's mine!" Recently a dear sister in the Lord was bedridden, dying of cancer, but when the brothers from the church went to pray with her, she didn't pray for herself, she prayed for them. They went to minister peace and love to her, and they left having been ministered to. What a joy! When God truly dwells in us, it makes such a huge difference. We no longer think primarily about our own wants and needs. We pray more for others than ourselves. Glory to God for that! Because we do it with a heart and desire to serve.

And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: ³⁰But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. There was no joy in the older brother. Instead, he got angry that there was a party. So angry that he refused to even enter the house. His father had to come out and plead with him, "Son, come on in!" And he replied, "No, I don't want to go in. You've been a bad father to me. Look how I work in this house! I do everything that needs doing! I go to the fields to work with the laborers. I come home late. I work all the hours God sends. I do everything you tell me to! And you've never even given me a goat for me to celebrate with my friends."

³¹*And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.* His father replied simply. "Everything in this house, everything I own, is yours. Everything." The son only had to say, "Dad, today I want to kill a lamb, have a party and invite our friends." The father wouldn't have opposed him. He wouldn't have opposed him! **He just had to take the blessing.** And nobody would have said anything about it, because everything was his! His father was saying to him, "Everything here is yours. You can enjoy it! No problem!" I imagine he would have added, "Don't worry about your younger brother, he won't do you any wrong! Everything is yours! If you haven't had a party, if you haven't enjoyed yourself it's because you haven't wanted to!"

It's like us here in this ministry. We have the bread of life; we have good, rich and flavorful spiritual food. We just have to want to eat it, to want to enjoy it, to want to share it! If we don't take advantage of it, it's because we don't want to! And if we do want to, we need to just go ahead and eat!

The older brother was so busy, so given to working and trying that he hadn't discovered his father's great love for him. How tragic! His striving prevented him from seeing it. He couldn't see that he himself was the owner of everything. With Christ, we are co-heirs of God (Romans 8:17.) Everything is ours! We shouldn't be ashamed to ask God for things, because He's our Father. We shouldn't be hesitant to ask Him to meet our needs. Some people say, "How would God feel if I asked him for something material?" He's our Father, the owner of the gold and the silver. Believe it! If the Bible tells me here that everything that He has is ours, I can ask him, "Send us what we need." It's not wrong to ask like that. God won't say, "Oh my goodness, he's asking me for money, that's just so unspiritual!" He knows that as His children we have needs. When my son Allan needs something for school, he asks me, "Dad, I need such and such a thing on such and such a day." And in the same way, when I need something, I ask my heavenly Father, "Dad, I need such and such a thing." That's how I talk with the Lord. What I want you to understand is that while we are in our Father's house and He is our Father, we have a right to many things and we simply have to take advantage of that. Let's not allow our working and striving and worry to blind us to the blessing of being sons of God!

³²*It was meet[necessary] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.* Why was it necessary? Because he had been lost. But if you really look at it, who do you think was the prodigal? In my opinion, it was not the one who left it came back, because he came back to his father, with an open, repentant heart. He didn't come saying, "OK, Dad, look, life has treated me bad but I'm here for more money from you. Who else can I go to, because only you can help me?" No, he came with this attitude, "Treat me like one of your hired servants because that's what I deserve." Perhaps as a child he had never been put to work, but now he'd seen the value of work and the like, and wanted to start from the bottom. Not as a master but as a worker. He had truly repented. But what was the older brother's attitude? Well, that's where this parable ends. A new chapter begins. It doesn't tell us whether the father and older son reconciled. The older brother was angry with his father. Even though he had everything there in his father's house, he couldn't enjoy any of it. So who was really the prodigal? It wasn't the one who left and returned. It was the one who had always been in his father's house. His attitude continued to keep him far from his father.

Glory to God, because our eyes are open and we can see what God has for us to enjoy in Him. Now that we are eating the bread of life, we should make merry in Him. The blessing of salvation and being in relationship with God as His sons and daughters does not come to us due to any sacrifice that we make. This blessing is already ours to be received and enjoyed. The Bible clearly states, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33.) While you walk with God, seeking first His kingdom, stop worrying about everything else, because God will provide. Even when the Lord seems slow in providing, don't worry, have patience. Trials work patience in us.

Let's make merry in the Lord. Listen, even if there seem to be no sheep in the fold, even if you open the fridge and there isn't even a carton of milk in there, even if you are assailed by the temptation to fear and doubt, don't worry. The word of God says that He will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory. That's what it says! Let's not have the same attitude as the older brother, refusing to trust in and enjoy his father's love. We should take advantage of our relationship with our Father.

We have the word of God. Let's eat of it. It's ours to take. Whatever we need, let's ask for it, because we know that whatever belongs to the Father also belongs to us. If we've made a mistake, there is room for us to repent. We're going to rejoice in doing what God tells us to do. As for the rest, we'll leave it to Him. He is faithful and just.

Who was really the prodigal son? The one who stayed at home with a closed-off heart. God our Father wants us to continually open our hearts to Him. To eat and drink of Him; of His word; trusting in Him. And in doing that, let's make merry in Him and enjoy Him! *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him* (Psalm 34:8)

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"IF ANYONE THIRST, LET THEM COME TO ME AND DRINK"- JESUS
(JOHN 7:37)