

## **Rejoice in the Father's Welcome**

### **Luke 15:11-32**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

There are two paths in life. One path leaves behind God's way of doing things. Those people chart their own course in life. Some of them may be free spirits that go whatever way feels right at the moment. Others of them may have some sort of code of conduct, for example saying, "I can do as I please, as long as no one gets hurt." Some of them may spiral out of control always looking for the next thrill: drugs, sex, violence, partying, drunkenness. Others of them may be better able to contain their short-term passions to achieve long term desires, such as power, control, money, security, fame, knowledge, beauty, and the like — but they still do it their way. Some of them boast of their godlessness; others of them hid under a public facade of rightness. Whatever form it may take, these people intentionally leave behind God's way, whether it's apparent on the surface or not. That's one path.

Who walks on the other path? The good people, the religious ones. They do their duty to God as best they can. They work hard, even slaving away. They come to church. They volunteer. They help the needy. They serve the community. They give their all day after day, marking their sacrifices. They fight the Lord's fights and work in his fields. No one would dare to accuse them of dereliction of duty or of ignoring God's law. They try their best to do their duty. And this path leads directly to hell, just like the first.

And those are the only two paths the world knows. Either you choose your own rules or you follow God's rules. And both end in hell, not much to give thanks for.

And both ways infect us, don't they? There are times when we've given into our sinful desires like those on the first path. Leaving behind our Father's home, we relished a forbidden pleasure, and then eventually felt the guilt. Maybe others didn't find out, but we knew and God knew.

On the other hand, how often when we do the right thing, do we do it grudgingly? We're like the child who cleans his room as he was told, but you can hear his feet stomping as he does it. We may not even be aware that this attitude infects us but instead imagine we're doing exactly as we're suppose to. Then something doesn't go right for us, and we get that feeling: "Doesn't God see how hard I'm trying! Why did he let this happen?" Now is that why we were doing good all this time? Trying to make God like us? Trying to get him on our side so that things go well for us? That's the path to hell.

There's another way this false path inside of us is exposed. Imagine a person who has followed their own path in life living it up and in doings so has hurt you badly. But in his or her last hours this person repents and is welcomed into heaven. How easy for us to think: "How unfair! I've been slaving away trying to do the right thing. I never got to enjoy life like they did, and now they're in heaven! It's not fair." Do you see how that exposes the false path within us?

These are the only two paths the world knows. These are the only two paths we know by nature. Either choose your own rules or follow God's rules. Both end in hell, not much to give thanks for.

But in his word the Father comes to you and me and pleads, "All I have is yours. I even gave my most precious Treasure. I gave you my own dear Son. How I long and desire for you to always be with me in the eternal celebration of heaven!"

Will we turn a deaf ear to our Father's heart? Will we defend ourselves claiming to have done our duty the best we can as we slaved away for him? Will we excuse our sins claiming the right to choose how we live? Or, dear friend, remembering the Father's mercy, will you and I confess, "I have sinned against heaven and against you, O God. Even my best is filthy rags. I am not worthy to be called your child."?

Look at the welcome the Father has for you who are turned by his love! He throws his arms around you and embraces you. His compassion and kindness shower you with kisses. He clothes you with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the best robe, the only robe that can cover our filthy rags. He welcomes you not as a slave or hired hand but as his own dear son. What a feast awaits us who are children of God through faith in Jesus, the One-and-Only who came from the Father for us! Rejoice in the Father's welcome. What a thanksgiving that is!

And as we cherish the Father's love, as we wear the robe of Christ's righteousness, as we anticipate the marriage banquet of the Lamb in the glory of heaven, then doing God's will is not a duty but a joy. It's not slaving away but our delight. Leaving his home to do our own thing strikes us as crazy. Staying to be with him fills us with the eager desire to follow his will in all we do. What a way to give thanks! What a way to rejoice!

This Thanksgiving rejoice in the Father's welcome as you take to heart and put into practice Jesus' words from Luke 15:

*Then Jesus said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his livelihood between them.*

*"Not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and left home for a far-off country. There he squandered his estate by loss living. After he had spent everything, a severe famine came throughout that country, and he began to be in need. He went and got connected to one of the citizens of that country. He sent him into his fields to feed pigs, and he kept wanting to fill up on the pods which the pigs ate, but no one would let him.*

*"Coming to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but here I perish from hunger. I will get up and go to my father and say to him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your presence. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men."' Then he got up and went to his father.*

*"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. Running, he embraced him and covered him with kisses.*

*"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your presence. I am no longer worthy to be called your son —'*

*"But the Father said to his servants, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it*

*on him. Place a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf. Slaughter it. Let's feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and has come alive again. He had been lost and has been found.' So they began to celebrate.*

*"Now the older son had been in the fields. As he came near to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked him what this might be. He said to him, 'Your brother has come back, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'*

*"He became angry and refused to go in. But his father went out and pleaded with him. He replied to his father, 'Look here, for so many year I have slaved for you and not once violated your command. But not once have you given to me a goat for me to celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours, who devoured your livelihood with prostitutes, came, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him!'*

*"He said to him, 'My child, you are always with me, and all that's mine is yours. But it was necessary to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and came alive, was lost and has been found.'" (Luke 15:11-32).*

This is the word of our Lord.