

Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21

²³ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? ²⁴ And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? ²⁶ But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. ²⁷ And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

Jesus is in church doing his thing when the religious self-righteous folks show up.

They ask him a question. It is a good question, what is the authority behind what you are doing? Who gave you permission? Where is this coming from?

The question is not wrong....the motivation and purpose behind the question is the problem. Why do you think they are asking this? To discredit or trap him because they feel threatened would be my guess.

Jesus in his wisdom, responds to their question with another question. I'll answer your question if you can answer a related question. What was the source and authority for John's ministry and baptism....did it come from heaven or from men?

Why do you think Jesus answers their question with a question?

- It was a way to get them to reflect internally and see their mistake and repent.
- Reveals the nature of their original question to him. If he says his authority is from heaven, they may call him a liar; if he says the authority comes from man, then they will say it is in error or not as powerful because it is not from God.
- For our benefit and example....ask the right questions when dealing with others.

They reason with themselves to justify their actions but not to repent. They consider the consequences of their answers before answering. This is generally wise as we should weigh the outcome of options before acting. The problem is they are reasoning among themselves rather than discussing this with God and for His glory. See what their reasoning reveals to us:

- They didn't believe in the ministry of John the Baptist. So, they are denying the Gospel.
- They fear the people and their response. Why fear the people? Because they feared losing power and prestige....more concerned with the things of the earth than the Kingdom.
- Today people (in church even) still do things to protect their position and these positions may not line up with kingdom perspectives.

They don't answer and so in turn Jesus will also not answer or fall into their trap. Again, their questions are influenced by evil and Christ's questions are designed for their good.

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' ²⁹ 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹ "Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

He now follows up with another question and a parable to provide a natural example they can relate to. Why ask a question and use a parable? Because in his mercy he is trying to get them to understand how the Kingdom works.

A man has two sons; both are given the same assignment. Both are to go out and work in the fields to produce and bring forth a harvest. One says no, but repents. The other says yes, but doesn't apply or follow-up his words with action. He says the right things but doesn't produce the desired results.

So he asks a follow-up question that they can easily answer.....which of the two sons did the will of the father? They answer correctly....the first son. The first son.

Let's dig deeper....what did the first son have to do in order to do the will of his father? First, he has to humble himself and recognize the need to change. Why did he say no in the first place? Because he didn't want to do it. Had other things he wanted to do. Didn't see the need to do it or please his father. So, first he has to recognize the need to change and humble himself, deny himself, put the needs of the father ahead of himself. That would be picking up the cross.

Note: The father has to direct, ask, and tell them where/when to work.

Next, he has to take the next step and repent or change and take the actual steps and go. Once you recognize the need to change, actually change your mind about it, and by faith go....you have completed the first three steps to pleasing the father because you now have a new mind.

Has anyone ever done this or gone through this process? You may not have known you were following the steps but you were.

Now the second son, I can relate to him as well. He says all the right things that the father wants to hear. I believe he really meant what he said (he might have been lying from the start). Let's assume however, he was sincere, he really intended to go do a work for his father in the field....why do you think he didn't follow-up? When you said something and didn't follow through, what happened to prevent you from keeping your word?

- Cares of life, other priorities, forgot, didn't mean to do it in the first place...
- Keep putting it off, don't think you can handle the job, waiting for help or the right time...

- Changed your mind, etc.
- Davy – only thinking about the moment.

Question, what would the second son now have to do in order to do the will of his father?

Answer....follow the same steps the first son did.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

So, now Jesus follows up the parable (a natural story) with a spiritual application....oh how he loves you and me.

He basically says sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes who they must have easily identified as sinners....are entering the kingdom of heaven ahead of the self-righteous temple attending folks. How can that happen? John came as the forerunner to Christ and told them how to follow the first 3-4 steps. They didn't believe him. They admitted to themselves they didn't believe.

Jesus says that the sinners did believe him. Again, the religious people acknowledge that the people believed John was a prophet and they followed the steps sincerely into baptism and new life. They are His beloved sons/daughters in whom God is well pleased through sincere baptism.

Finally, he includes them and calls them out by saying they see and know this but still refuse to follow the steps and believe. Notice the order Jesus uses, repenting and then believing. There has to be some element or degree of belief in the beginning....this is a higher level of faith and belief.

Now, let's go back to the parable and connect the dots.

In the parable, who does the father represent? God the father.

Who do the two sons represent? Us and the different responses we have.

What does the vineyard represent? The field, the church, the place(s) where the Father wants us to work and do His will in the earth.

Observations: The Father, still today calls His children to believe and do His will in the world. You can't please the Father and do his will without first recognizing the need, changing your mind and putting the needs of the Father ahead of our needs, and by faith going out and doing those things....actually doing those things and going to the place to put that work in.

That is the spiritual application for this parable. Let's now see the real-life application to this specific case.

The father in this case study is still God the Father.

The first son, the one who starts out wrong, says all the wrong things, rebels, etc., must represent the sinners who have repented and now believe and are doing the will of the Father. They didn't start out correct, but they finish strong.

The second son must represent the scribes and pharisees. They start out correct, seem good on the outside. Say all the right things. But they are hypocrites....because they don't follow what they say they believe and ultimately do not please or do the will of the Father and will not change. Why, because change requires recognizing the need to change and they are too self-righteous and protective of their status to ever admit they are wrong and need to repent.

So the ones they call sinners will enter the Kingdom first. The first shall be last and the last shall be first....again.

Question – which son do you think you are? Do you know how to always be consistently the son who does the will of the Father?

I used to use this scripture as an excuse to go off. I'm changing that now. I want to both speak right and do right.

Notes from the Commentaries:

DG - They answered only after carefully calculating the political consequences of either answer. They didn't seem interested in answering the question honestly, only cleverly.

- The point of this parable is clear. What matters is living for God, not saying the right words. The religious leaders were good at talking righteous talk, but their stubbornly unrepentant hearts showed that repentant sinners would **enter the kingdom before** them.

Spurgeon - "The second son said, 'I go, sir,' but he went not; and these people do not go. They talk of repenting, but they do not repent. They speak of believing, but they never believe. They think of submitting to God, but they have not submitted themselves to him yet. They say it is time they broke up the fallow ground, and sought the Lord, but they do not seek him. It all ends in a mere promise."

Matthew Henry – 1 Cor 3:19

- Many that will not be kept by the fear of sin from neglecting and opposing that which they know to be true and good are kept by the fear of shame from owning that to be true and good which they neglect and oppose. Thus they *reject the counsel of God against themselves*, in not submitting to John's baptism, and are left without excuse.
- The gospel call to work in the vineyard, requires present obedience; *Son, go work to-day*, while it is called to-day, because *the night comes when no man can work*. We were not sent into the world to be idle, nor had we daylight given us to play by; and therefore, if ever we mean to do any thing for God and our souls, why not now? Why not to-day?
- He that told his father to his face, that he *would not* do as he bid him, deserved to be turned out of doors, and disinherited; but our God *waits to be gracious*, and, notwithstanding our former follies, if we repent and mend, will favourably accept of us; blessed be God, we are under a covenant that leaves room for such a repentance.