

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Parable of Two Sons

Sermon 13

Mt 21:28-32

I. ILLUSTRATION—KEEPING BRAND PROMISE AND TRUST

1. DEFUNCT THINGS

- DVD recorders—hard to find recordable discs—forget VHS and 8-track!
- Retail—Sanger Harris (1987)—North Hills Mall (2004)—Foleys (2006)
- Petroleum—Gulf Oil (1985)—Kerr McGee (2006)
- Bookstores—Waldenbooks (2011)—Borders (2011)—B. Dalton (2013)—LifeWay (2019)
- Airlines—Braniff (1982)—Eastern (1991)—PanAm (1991)—TWA (2001)
- S&H Green Stamps—1896-1990s—can still redeem online Greenpoints!

2. STILL GOING STRONG

- **Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval**
- Founded by magazine in 1909
- Key developer from 1912—Harvey Wiley—American chemist—first head of FDA
- Product bearing seal come with limited warranty
- If defective within two years of purchase
- Refund purchase price (up to \$2000)—repair—replace
- Companies must earn seal
- Products tested by GH Research Institute for
 - Quality standards
 - Environmental soundness
 - Packaging and distribution

THE POWER OF BRAND LOYALTY RESIDES IN CONSUMER TRUST
TRUST IS BUILT NOT JUST ON QUALITY—BUT ALSO ON KEEPING OUR WORD
WHEN PEOPLE LOOK AT THE CHURCH CAN THEY TRUST US TO KEEP OUR WORD
SUCH TRUST REVOLVES AROUND 3 THINGS: OBEDIENCE, INTEGRITY AND LOVE

II. SETTING AND SITUATION

- ❖ EVENTS LEADING TO PARABLE
 - Triumphant Entry
 - Cleansing of Temple
 - Barren Fig Tree
 - Jesus' Authority Challenged—by Religious Leaders

- o Jesus' Response—Challenging Question about John's baptism

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—Mt 21:28-32

Mt 21:28-32—28 *But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'* 29 *And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went.* 30 *The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go.* 31 *Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first."* Jesus said to them, *"Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.* 32 *For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.*

IV. EXPLANATION

A. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

1. EVENTS FOLLOWING PARABLE

- a. Matthew has two more parables
 - The Wicked Tenants—The Marriage Feast
- b. Confrontations in Temple
 - Pharisees/Herodians—Sadducees—The Lawyer
 - Jesus challenges Pharisees: Christ as the Son of David
- c. Woes upon Pharisees—**chapter 23**

2. SYNOPTIC CONTEXT

- a. This parable is not in Mark or Luke
- b. **Matthew 21-22**—has three parables
 - Two Sons—Wicked Tenants—Wedding Feast
- c. **Mark 12**—has only one parable—after religious leaders challenged Jesus
 - Wicked Tenants
 - Gives fuller audience for setting—chief priests, scribes, and elders
- d. **Luke**—has two parables
 - Wedding Feast—in *earlier* setting—**Lk 14**
 - Wicked Tenants—in this setting—just after challenge to Jesus—**Lk 20**

3. BIBLICAL PASSAGES—PARALLEL SAYINGS—SAYING BUT NOT DOING

- a. Old Testament

Is 29:13—Jesus quoted in Mk 7—*this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.*

Ezek 33:32—God said to Ezekiel—*Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not practice them.*

b. New Testament

Sermon on the Mount—Mt 7:21—*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*

Mt 23:2-3—*The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds, for they say things and do not do them.*

B. PROBLEM—PURPOSE—FOCUS

1. PROBLEM

a. RELIGIOUS LEADERS’ ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR

- Legalistic—merciless and no relationship with God
- Self-righteous—thought only they were ‘right’ before God
- Arrogance—holier than thou—better than ‘sinners’ and tax-collectors
- Hypocrisy—saying one thing—but doing another
- Usurped Authority—assumed they were in control of God’s agenda

b. Jesus really **loved** them!

- His concern—was to recover them!

2. PURPOSE

- o To open religious leaders’ eyes
- o For them to acknowledge their sin
- o For them to repent and obey—and enter the kingdom

3. FOCUS AND SCOPE

- a. **Not** about—Jews’ disobedience—and gospel being offered to obedient Gentiles
- b. **Not** about—the Israel being God’s kingdom—the vineyard is not Israel
- c. But about—simple **obedience** to God
 - Accepting God’s authority and plan of redemption
 - Which John had introduced—pointing to Jesus—as the authoritative Son of God

C. MATTHEW’S PROGRESSION OF PARABLES

❖ TWO SONS → WICKED TENANTS → WEDDING FEAST

- a. Increasing **rebellion** against authority
 - Father's authority challenged
 - Vineyard owner's authority usurped
 - King's authority totally disregarded
- b. Heightened **punishment**
 - Self-condemnation
 - Cutting off access to the vineyard/kingdom
 - Cast out of banquet/kingdom
- c. Unfolding revelation of the Son
 - **No son** satisfactory—begs a third son—who obeys
 - Son who is **rejected**
 - Son who is **honored**

D. THE PARABLE

1. THE FATHER

- o A father's absolute authority—in ancient Middle-eastern culture
- o A reasonable request

2. FIRST SON

- a. **Insulted** father grievously—but was **honest**!
- b. Regrets—**μεταμελομαι** = **emotional** change—feeling remorse
 - Not full repentance—**μετανοεω** = change of mind/will
- c. Then 'went'—implies that he obeyed and worked
- d. Note—he did not apologize
 - But his actions demonstrated submission to authority and obedience

3. SECOND SON

- a. Prompt—polite—and respectful **word**—"Sir"
- b. But dishonest behavior—more disrespectful **heart** than first son

4. COMPARISON

- o First son—was disrespectful—but honest—and obedient
- o Second son—was respectful in word—but dishonest in heart—and disobedient in action

5. JESUS' QUESTION

- a. Led religious leaders to indict themselves [implied]
 - Like Nathan did with his parable to David—**II Sam 12:1-10**

- b. An **odd variant**—rejected by most scholars
 - Some manuscripts say—it was the *second* son who obeyed!
 - Middle Eastern culture says an insult to one’s father is more grievous
 - One day’s work in a field is nothing in comparison to a lasting insult
- c. Note: **both** sons were **unsatisfactory**
 - Both **hurt** the Father
 - But the **first** one—at least showed remorse and obeyed
- d. Note: the obvious need for a **third Son**
 1. One who **says yes** immediately and **obeys**
 2. Obviously—this was Jesus
 - His passion was to do the will of the Father
 - His own authority came from the Father
 - He *was* the ‘way of righteousness’

6. JESUS’ SHOCKING ANNOUNCEMENT

- a. He *commended* tax collectors and prostitutes!
- b. He *challenged* the religious leaders—*they* will enter the kingdom before you!
- c. **Imagine**—their strong reaction
 - ‘Publicans’ and ‘sinners’ were unclean and irreligious!
- d. **Note:** Jesus did not say they could not get in—they still had a chance!

7. JESUS’ INDICTMENT

- a. They had rejected John’s ‘**way of righteousness**’
 1. Jesus was answering his earlier question—that he had asked them—**v25**
 - John’s baptism **was from heaven**, not from men!
 2. Further **implication**
 - Jesus’ own baptism at John’s hands had ‘fulfilled all righteousness’
 - John’s had prepared the ‘way’—pointing to Jesus as authoritative Son of God
 - This Jesus *was* ‘the way of righteousness’
- b. They **failed**—at their **first chance**
 1. They did not believe John
 2. Read this in context—of **Lk 7:18-30**
 - John sent his deputation to Jesus
 - Ended with Jesus’ commendation of John
 - The people and tax collectors acknowledged God’s justice
 - They affirmed their baptism by John

- But the Pharisees and Scribes rejected God's purpose for them
- c. They **failed** again—at their **second** chance
 1. Tax collectors/prostitutes set the example by believing John
 - **Implied**—they accepted John's authority—pointing to Jesus' greater authority
 - **Implied**—they obeyed and were baptized
 - This is why—they were 'coming in'—**v31**
 2. But religious leaders had not learned and followed their example
 - They stubbornly refused to believe
 - They showed no remorse—so were **doubly at fault**
 3. Jesus' words were a double insult to them
 - Not only were sinners entering the kingdom before them
 - They were **humiliated**—expected to follow the example of unclean 'sinners'

8. IMPLIED INVITATION

- o Jesus was not finished with them
- o They still had a *third* chance
- o And He continued to challenge them—to repent—see **Mt 23**

E. MAIN POINTS

1. THIS IS ABOUT TRUSTWORTHINESS → OBEDIENCE—INTEGRITY—AND LOVE

2. GOD EXPECTS PRODUCTIVE **OBEDIENT** LIVING

- a. **Words** never take the place of **deeds**
 - Lip service and posturing are not enough
 - Courtesy and flattering politeness are not enough
- b. God wants not just promise—but practice
 - Not just profession—but performance
- c. The **lesson** is this
 - **Doing God's will**—is the one necessary thing
 - It defines—our purpose in life
 - It identifies—us as His true children

3. THIS IS A MATTER OF **INTEGRITY**

- a. Not just **saying**—but **doing** what you say
- b. It goes back to Jesus' exhortations
 1. Sermon on Mount—**Mt 7:15-27**
 - Only those who **do** His Father's can enter the kingdom of heaven
 2. Do not be like the Pharisees—**Mt 23:2-3**

➤ They tell others to do things—and **do not do** those things themselves!

4. WE PROVE THAT WE **LOVE** GOD BY OUR ACTIONS

- a. This is not just about entering the kingdom of heaven—and glory
- b. Notice—Jesus refers to the ‘**Kingdom of God**’ here
 - Matthew’s usual term is ‘Kingdom of Heaven’
 - But here Jesus puts the emphasis on **God** Himself
- c. This is about our **personal relationship** and **obedience** to the **Person** of God
 - Disbelief and disobedience are not just breaking ‘rules taught by men’
 - They are an affront to God Himself—and prove that our ‘hearts are far from Him’

V. APPLICATION

1. JOHN’S ‘WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS’

- a. Jesus’ basic message
 - *The time has come: the kingdom is near, repent and believe the good news*
- b. The Good News is—Jesus is the ‘way of righteousness’
 - *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*
- c. This parallels the identity of the Early Church
 - *The ‘Way’*—was about living/doing—not just saying/speaking
- d. The call is to
 - *Deny self, take up your cross and follow Him—along the Way*

2. THREE CAVEATS

- a. Remember the **hard call** to discipleship
 - Whoever loves anything more than me—cannot be My disciple
 - Whoever is not willing to carry the cross—cannot be My disciple
 - Whoever does not give up everything to Me—cannot be My disciple
- b. Initial **agreement alone** is not enough—it must be followed by obedience
- c. Good **intentions** are not enough
 - The road to hell is paved with good intentions

3. THREE KINDS OF DECISIONS—THAT WE DELAY ACTION

- For salvation
- For discipleship
- For some specific act of obedience

4. WHY WE DELAY—applied to all three kinds of situations

- a. We do **not believe**—setting our minds/hearts above—the **witness** of God

- b. We are **rebellious**—obstinate—setting our will against—the **counsel** of God
- c. We make **excuses**—and postpone—setting our agendas before—the **plan** of God
 - I'll always have time later—ignoring the call—**hard ground**
 - Lack of commitment—**shallow ground**
 - Lure of secular attractions—distractions—**thorny ground**
 - Overcome by everyday burden—**thorny ground**

5. IT IS NOT TOO LATE

- o Our initial refusal—does not mean final disobedience

VI. INVITATION

GOD IS CALLING THROUGH THE WHISPER

God is calling through the whisper of the Spirit's deepest sighs;
Through the thrill of sudden beauties that can catch us by surprise.
Flash of lightning, crash of thunder; hush of stillness, rush of wonder:
God is calling—can you hear? God is calling—can you hear?

God is calling through the voices of our neighbors' urgent prayers;
Through their longing for redemption and for rescue from despair.
Place of hurt or face of needing; strident cry or silent pleading:
God is calling—can you hear? God is calling—can you hear?

God is calling through the music of sublime and human arts;
Through the hymns of earth and angels, and the carols of our hearts.
Lift of joy and gift of singing; days and nights our praises bringing:
God is calling—can you hear? God is calling—can you hear?