

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

Matthew 21:28-32

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The name of my sermon is The Parable of the Two Sons, and I have three points to my sermon:

- Jesus made it clear that repentance is the key
- Jesus made it clear that it's never too late
- Jesus made it clear that talk is cheap

INTRODUCTION: As we know from reading the parables, Jesus often responded to questions with a parable. When he was asked by his disciples about forgiveness, he responded with the parable of the unmerciful servant. In that parable a servant was forgiven by his master who in turn was harsh to someone who owed him money.

When he was asked about what rewards the disciples would receive for giving up everything to follow him, he responded with the parable of the workers in the vineyard. That parable is about workers getting paid the same even though some worked longer hours than others. It's a great illustration of people loving all their children, regardless of birth order.

Not only did Jesus use parables to reply to questions from his disciples, he also used them with the opposition.

In Matthew 21, Jesus was coming to the end of his earthly ministry. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and people laid down cloaks and palm branches on the street as they cheered. Jesus went into the temple and threw out the money changers. He healed people. Children began calling out "Hosanna!" And some people got upset! The chief priests and the teachers of the law did not like what they saw and heard.

Jesus was clearly a threat to them. If people started following him, they would be unemployed!

That night, Jesus went to Bethany where he spent the night. The next day he cursed a fig tree that was bearing no fruit. He returned to the temple and began teaching. By now, the religious leaders were furious and asked who gave him the authority to be teaching. When he threw them a question they could not answer, he said he would not answer their question either.

Then Jesus told three parables: the parable of the two sons, the parable of the tenants, and the parable of the wedding banquet. Here's an example of Jesus confronting his opposition with parables.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 21:28-31

“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.

The parable is very simple. A man tells two sons to go to work. One says no, later regrets it, and goes to work. The other says yes but never does anything.

Jesus was quite a story teller because the religious leaders fell right into his trap. He asked who did the right thing and they said the first son who said no, felt bad, and later did what his father told him.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 21:31-32

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.

EXPLANATION: Then Jesus explained the parable. Those who said no but later went were those who were considered awful by the religious leaders. The tax collectors worked for the Roman government and earned a living by getting more

tax than required. The Jews despised living under the Roman government and they hated the tax collectors.

Then there's the harlot. The one who had abandoned all morals just to make money. The one who worked the world's oldest profession and was about as far away from holy as one could get. The one who would in no way be considered clean enough to ever enter the temple. The tax collector and the harlot were both people who took money but in different ways.

You know Jesus sure said a whole lot about money. Overall the Bible says a whole lot about money. Why? Because money gets to the core of the person.

The religious leaders listening to Jesus' teaching were no doubt furious when he said the tax collector and prostitute would enter heaven before they would. They must have been completely shocked! The nerve of Jesus to say that! He certainly wasn't winning new friends that day.

Let's look back at what the religious leaders had witnessed Jesus do. They saw him run money changers out of the temple. The temple had basically become a yard sale of lame animals sold for sacrifices. The religious would have known Jesus did the right thing. They saw him heal people. Who did they think was the source of his power? They knew it was supernatural and they knew it wasn't evil. The truth is they refused to believe Jesus' power and authority were from God even though people were healed in their presence.

JESUS MADE IT CLEAR THAT REPENTANCE IS THE KEY

The son who said no to his father, that he would not work in the vineyard, he reminds me of the rebellious child who refuses to do what's right. He reminds me of the story of the prodigal son, which Bill preached about a few weeks ago. Eventually he ran out of money and returned home.

ILLUSTRATION: A long time ago when I was doing youth ministry, I remember a teenage girl who told her mom to shut up and give her the car keys. She absolutely refused to do the right thing over and over. Whatever happened to her I don't know.

EXPLANATION: The religious elite would have thought it impossible for a tax collector who took money from the Jews and gave it to the Romans to have any favor with God. The religious elite would have thought it impossible for a harlot to be cleansed of her sin. But God specializes in forgiveness and making people new.

In the parable, the first son felt bad for saying no and returned to work in the vineyard. You might say that merely saying no was not a sin, but it was – he disobeyed. You may have seen the billboards around Tennessee that say “Real Christians obey Christ’s teachings.” Being a disciple is more than being a fan. A disciple wants to be like the one he is following.

The way you become a disciple of Jesus Christ is by setting aside your desires for his desires, by setting aside your agenda for his, by treating people like he treated people when he was on this earth.

APPLICATION: To a certain degree all of us are like the first son. We all want to do our own thing. We want to do what’s convenient for us. We all struggle with rebellion and stubbornness.

I Samuel 15:23 Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols.

Isaiah 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our rebellion.

Not only did Jesus make it clear that repentance is the key -

JESUS MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT’S NEVER TOO LATE

ILLUSTRATION: I have a friend who is about 60 who says God has just now called him into the ministry. He’s starting his seminary training in a few months. He has a debilitating illness but he’s not letting that stop him. He is not boohooing over not being 25 years old with many years ahead of him. His life is far from perfect. In fact, he has a lot of problems, but he’s doing what he believes he should do. He has preaching engagements at a nursing home and through a truck stop ministry. He

asked for my advice and I told him several things, one of which was this: People may have a hard time believing you've been called into the ministry. Be nice to them and keep moving. No worries, don't try to convince them. They'll see it over time.

APPLICATION: If I've just described you – if you were that person who said no – you can do an about-face right now. Start where you are. Be open to God leading you.

If God called you and you didn't obey, you can obey now. There is no need to continue a life of disobedience, rebellion, and stubbornness.

Likewise, if you are one of those who said yes, but never did, then you can start right now as well. Don't be like those religious leaders who knew the scriptures by heart and spent literally years of their lives studying and discussing it, but never let it transform them.

These are the same people Jesus called “whitewashed tombs”... painted to look different than a tomb but still a tomb nevertheless.

Not only did Jesus make it clear that repentance is the key and that it's never too late...

JESUS MADE IT CLEAR THAT WORDS ARE CHEAP

The son who says he will work in the vineyard but doesn't do it reminds me of the one who has what I call a brief spiritual impulse. He might shed a tear every now and then. He might hear a sermon that touches his heart temporarily. He sits in the sanctuary and decides he's going to respond to that urge from the Lord, but ten minutes after he gets in his car, he's either forgotten it, or rationalized that he was just too emotional earlier. Now that he's come to his senses, he feels silly.

ILLUSTRATION: Sometimes people I rarely see – I mean like hardly ever – able-bodied people – pop up out of nowhere and want to impress me with how spiritual they are. They'll tell me they called some TV prayer line, and they go on and on with cheap words, like I care. One able-bodied person handed me a scrap piece of paper with a list of all the religious TV she watches. She'd probably be shocked to

know I never watch any of them – ever. Someday I am just going to look at one of those persons and say, “I’m not sure why you want me to know this. Why don’t you put all that faith into action and help us out around here?”

EXPLANATION: The son who says he will work in the vineyard but doesn’t do it reminds me of the one who likes his comfortable life like it is. He thinks “If I tell Dad no, he’ll just hire someone else, so why should I do it?” He doesn’t want any blisters, he doesn’t want to be inconvenienced, he wants to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it. To this son, work is in his way. He didn’t want the *responsibility* of being a son, he just wanted to be *identified* as a son of the owner of the vineyard.

I read articles from time to time which talk about cheap grace, or what we call easy believe-ism. It’s not a new concept. It’s been around since the early days of Christianity. The son who says he will work in the vineyard but doesn’t do it reminds me of the one who knows God loves him no matter what, so therefore he takes no risks. He’s the one who says he’s saved by God’s grace and that obeying God is just legalism. He’s the one who says since we are not saved by works then strict obedience is works.

Yes, the second son, the one who says he’ll go to work but doesn’t, he’s the one who is the thinker, the rationalizer, the one with the tricky philosophies.

I have this image in my mind of a person who has grown up knowing the truth, and can quote scriptures, but in the end, he refuses to live up to them. He’s more concerned about people knowing he knows scripture than he is about letting scripture transform his life.

ILLUSTRATION: From time to time I tell you about my experiences recruiting chaplains for the Air Force. In that job, I learned a whole lot about human nature and people who said they had a calling from God. I had been working the job for probably three years when a name came across my computer screen that I did not know. The truth was he had been processing since before I took the job. It was around that time I came up with my own saying: “Your application cannot be a part-time hobby that you work on from time to time when you have nothing better to do. Either you want this or you don’t, but I don’t have to be part of your part-

time hobby.” I usually disqualified those people at my discretion and moved on. Occasionally, one of them would take me seriously and become a good applicant.

CONCLUSION: Folks, words are cheap. Action requires effort. What’s needed today among those who say that they follow Christ are those who actually follow Christ’s commands.

When we obey his commands we are not earning our salvation in any way, we are merely doing our duties as believers in, and followers of, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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