

NEW TRUTH FROM AN OLD STORY 13

“The Parable of the Two Sons”

Matthew 21: 28-32

This parable is about as straight forward as any we have discussed thus far. It appears immediately after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. At the height of his popularity; the height of the Pharisee's disdain and disapproval is also reached. This parable appears in the middle of 3 stories, somewhat related I suppose. The first is of Jesus cursing the fig tree (which represents Israel) for not bearing or producing any fruit, and the last is the Wedding Feast Parable, where the Father compels his workers to compel the least, the last, and the lost to come in; because the invited guests (the Israelites) have snubbed their King's invitation. Obviously this one is also directed at the Pharisees. Here in the middle, Jesus continues his barrage of attacks on the waywardness of Phariseeism, the distortions of Judaism, and the hypocrisy of all self-righteousness. Let's give a listen:

“But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ The son answered, ‘No, I won’t go,’ but later he changed his mind and went anyway. Then the father told the other son, ‘You go,’ and he said, ‘Yes, sir, I will.’ But he didn’t go.

‘Which of the two obeyed his father?’ They replied, ‘the first.’

Then Jesus explained his meaning: ‘I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn’t believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.’

Are you beginning to feel a bit sorry for the stupid Pharisees? Don't you suppose the Pharisees are getting a bit tired of always being shown up by Jesus? Don't you wonder why they continue to hatch these “three stooges” attempts to catch him in his words? Wouldn't you think they'd give up their knucklehead efforts to outwit the divine wisdom in God's Son? I do; ...then I remember who are the 21st Century Pharisees!!

But you have to admit there was not a cut and dried 'right answer' to Jesus' question here. In fact, it is rather amazing these Jews answered so quickly, for many of them (not unlike some of us) would probably consider the 'in your face defiance' of the older son, to be a far more egregious a sin, than a silly syrupy "yes sir," then not showing up for work one day. A number of interesting particulars will be discussed, but let's first hear the parallel passage from Luke's similar account: Luke 7: 29-30:

When they heard this, all the people – even the tax collectors – agreed that God's way was right, for they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in religious law rejected God's plan for them, for they had refused John's Baptism.

'To what can I compare the people of this generation?' Jesus asked. 'How can I describe them'? They are like children playing a game in the public square...

For John the Baptist didn't spend his time eating bread or drinking wine, and you say 'He's possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!' But wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it.'

Some of the more obvious points of the story are; that all of us are to be people of our word, actions speak louder than words, if you are going to talk the talk, then you better walk the walk, and wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it.

I want to look today at the 2 brothers, and consider 'the point' for our lives.

1. THE FIRST SON'S RESPONSE:

DEFIANCE, DISOBEDIENCE; REPENTANCE, OBEDIENCE

We don't get a lot of details to go on here do we? This is one of the shorter stories we have looked at. The older son is told to go work in the field. That was not inappropriate for a father to expect his elder son to be helping in the field. We might wonder why the dad had to ask, and assume, maybe, that this son was being negligent, but we are not sure. The kid's flat out refusal, even to offer an excuse can hardly be viewed as anything short of defiance, and that defiance gave way to disobedience as he refuses to do what his father asks.

The apple hasn't fallen far from the proverbial tree. How many of us have offered this response when God came calling to our heart? It is said of most churches that they are a willing bunch. 10% are willing to do the work, and 90% are willing to let them! But it hurts both, the 10% grow weary of the criticism, and overwork, and the 90% grow critical and negative because they are not living in harmony with God's will. Maybe a lesson we might learn from this story would be to rectify this situation. God has something for you to do for Him, whether in the church, or in the larger community, lets not pull this defiant attitude when God comes calling us!

The original meaning of Jesus story is clear. The first son stands for the tax collectors and the sinners. Their lives looked like a blunt refusal to have anything to do with God; as do all sinners lives. And yet, when Jesus came they listened to Him and changed their lives to fit His message and meet His demands, and they become the hero's of our parable!

That is the key to this first son's part of the story. Though we are again given scant details concerning why, this son, changes his mind and heads for the fields. The phrase 'changed his mind', carries a hint of the meaning of repentance. Like the son in the Prodigal story, he comes to his senses and heads for home.

Repentance is key for us as well. Repentance often provides the prelude to obedience. Most of us don't care about doing the right thing, until we admit we have been doing the wrong things. Most of us don't worry about being found, until we realize we have been lost. If you find yourself in the 90% today, admit your mistake, and make it right. If you find yourself in the 10%, angry and not happy about it, ...well, we'll address you now.

2. THE SECOND SON'S RESPONSE: DISHONESTY, DISOBEDIENCE

This second son offers up a lip service “Yes, Sir”, but then chooses not to act on what he had agreed to do.

Sounds like he’s been to the same ‘manner’s school as the little boy whose momma had recently born him a new little brother. While on maternity leave, she brought in her new bundle of joy to her office. She also took her seven-year-old son with her. Everyone was cooing and oohing while gathered around the baby, when the little boy asked, "Mommy, can I have some money to buy a soda?" "What do you say?" she said. Respectfully, the boy replied, "You’re thin and beautiful, mommy."

The second son stands for the Scribes and the Pharisees all right. All their lives were one long profession that they would serve God and obey His commandments. All their lives and their history were filled with covenants and promises, hopes and dreams, spiritual experiences and divine visitations, messianic expectations and preparations; and yet when the Son of God came they refused to have anything to do with Him and in the end crucified Him.

Here is how the Apostle Paul describes their condition:

“They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God’s adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshipping him and receiving his wonderful promises. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. Rom 9: 4-5

Oh, they became proficient, even profound with their spoken and written records of their abiding faithfulness, their extreme activism, their penchant for detailed law keeping, but where did it get them? When the Messiah came, they missed him, because their religion had replaced the reality of the real Savior! And they were far more interested in preserving their perverted understanding of religion, than in meeting, and following the God who birthed that religion, and graciously, but inexplicably invited them to join it in the first place.

Oh...I suppose we have to apply this don't we? We better be careful here!

This parable lays down the always-valid truth that words can never take the place of deeds. Ask your kids if this isn't true! I know we need to be reminded that we are not saved by our deeds, but our salvation ought to produce appropriate deeds.

There is an obvious difference in the way the two sons answer their father's request. Obvious, but we miss it sometimes.

The first answers with contemptuous bluntness. The second says all the things which politeness demands, even adding "sir" to his daddy's request. But neither verbal discourtesy nor surface politeness could take the place of deeds! The older son may have been elevated as the example of the more obedient son, but The Father couldn't be happy with either kid's response!

And in the end that is what we are after, not just obedience, but doing the right things to enjoy God's favor.

Much like last week, this story, with its two main characters, represent all of us, as one or the other. More accurately, these two characters represent the choice that each of us face and must make; and both are daunting! We who are sinners, tax-collectors and prostitutes, gossips and time wasters must decide if we will repent of our sin, and get to work in God's kingdom. We who are Pharisees, long negligent of our spiritual heritage, noses up in the air, appalled at the sinners around us, failing to extend our influence beyond ourselves, relying on our slick religion while ignoring our Serving Savior, must make our repentance as well. You see the only difference between son number one and son number two; is repentance that leads to obedience. And repentance is not an act reserved just for the sinners who know they need it, but the saints who think they don't! Repentance is essential before one can be saved, but repentance is still necessary even after one is saved.

Listen closely; this might be a confusing paragraph.

The amazing thing that I see in these two sons and their reactions to the command of the father to work in the vineyard is that the son who is outwardly **rebellious** becomes the inwardly **obedient** son, which is what **repentance** produces. While the one who is outwardly **obedient** becomes the one who is inwardly **rebellious**, which is what **Phariseeism** produces.

It boils down to walking the walk, not just talking the talk. We have many in most churches that are intimately familiar with the language of the Club, but unfamiliar with the Master of the club, and foreign to serving in His name. We have many in the church who are singing; Standing on the Promises, who are merely sitting on the premises. We have many in the church who are singing; I'll Go Where You send Me In Jesus' Name; as long as it's not Africa, or Bolivia, or The Lions Club, or Standing Rock, or Miracle Mart. We have many in the church who are singing; I Surrender All, but who complain about 10%. We have many in the church who are singing; Rescue the Perishing, but who wouldn't think they might be the ones Perishing! We have many in the church who know the language, and are talking the talk, and we have some who are walking the walk. The first must decrease, the second, increase. Which son are you? Which daughter are you? Remember the key? REPENTANCE = OBEDIENCE

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Luke 7: 29-30

1. THE FIRST SON’S RESPONSE:

_____, _____, _____, _____

2. THE SECOND SON’S RESPONSE:

_____, _____

The amazing thing that I see in these two sons and their reactions to the command of the father to work in the vineyard is that the son who is outwardly _____ becomes the inwardly _____ son, which is what _____ produces. While the one who is outwardly _____ becomes the one who is inwardly _____, which is what _____ produces.

