



## World Christian Fellowship

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### Parable of Two Sons Matthew 21:28-32

**Matthew 21:28-32**, *“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’<sup>29</sup> He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went.<sup>30</sup> Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.<sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first.”*

*Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.<sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.*

Jesus often responded to questions by His disciples answering them in parables.

#### **Matthew 18:21-35, "The Unmerciful Servant"**

Jesus gave this parable in response to the question by Peter and rest of the disciples about forgiveness.

## **Matthew 20:1-16, "The Laborers in The Vineyard"**

This parable in reply to a question raised by His disciples about what would receive who have given up all to follow Jesus.

Jesus also used parables in replying to some of the challenges by those who opposed Him.

Now it is just 2 days away from Jesus is going to be crucified, He entered the temple and cleared the money changers and chased away all the animal sellers.

The religious leaders questioned Him about His authority.

**V 23**, *Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"*

Jesus did not answer them immediately but then He asked them a counter question.

**V 25**, *The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'*

But then they chose to answer we don't know.

Jesus said to them neither will I answer.  
But then Jesus chose to answer them with three parables.

**Matthew 21:28-32, "The Parable of Two Sons"**

**Matthew 21:22-46, "The Wicked Vinedressers"**

**Matthew 22:1-14, "The Wedding Feast"**

### **Understanding the parable**

Jesus initiates this stage of the conversation with a question.

**V 28,** *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.'*

*What do you think?*

They had just refused to answer a question Jesus asked them.  
They simply said we don't know.

Now Jesus makes them to answer by giving them this parable.

Now before we move on, let me say here that in some ancient manuscripts of the New Testament the order of the two sons is reversed.

So, if your Bible has this you will know what is going on.

## Older Son:

**V 28,** *A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.'*

The word translated as “first” can also mean “older,” as in the oldest son.

When the father says, “*son, go and work,*” it is actually “*child, go and work,*” a more affectionate way of putting it. He is asking him to do some work on the family farm.

Father is the owner of the farm.

Eldest son has the responsibility to take care of the business.

The father asks him to do the work ‘*today*’

Maybe he couldn’t hire anyone.

**V 29,** *He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went.*

The son’s response is rude and disrespectful.

In its culture this would be seen as rebellious and unacceptable.

A real contrast to the father’s affectionate address to him.

Although he said no, he does work.

The word can be translated as,

- Regretted,
- Changed his mind
- Repented.

This part of the parable has some connection to **Luke 15** and the parable of the prodigal son.

The only other parable of Jesus that involves a father and two sons. The first son here is quite like the prodigal son.

**Luke 15:11-13**, *Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. <sup>13</sup>And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.*

Later he repented and returned to his father.

**Luke 15:18-20**, *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, <sup>19</sup>and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." ' <sup>20</sup>"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*

Both show us what repentance looks like. They changed their minds and acted differently.

**V 30**, *Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go.*

This is a very respectful answer, in contrast to the first son's words to his father.

The word "sir" is from the Greek word '**Kyrios**' meaning 'lord' or 'master.'

He said yes, but he was full of hot air.

In the Parable of Prodigal son, the elder son refused to go inside.

**Luke 15:28**, *"But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.*

Jesus' interpretation

**V 31**, *Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.*

From this we see that the father represents God.

<b>Son</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Repentance</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Reflection</b>
First	I will NOT	Yes	Worked	Obedience
Second	I will	No	No work	Disobedience

The first son represents the tax collectors & prostitutes. They said no to God initially, but when they heard the message of the kingdom, they changed their minds and began to do God's will.

The second son represents the chief priests and elders. They said yes to God, but when they heard the message, they did not act.

The vineyard represents Israel, the people of God.

The point of the parable is clear.

Those who refuse God but later repent and obey, like the first son, will go into the kingdom.

Those who say yes, but don't obey God, like the second son will not go into the kingdom.

Notice how Jesus forces them to answer.

The only possible answer to his question is that the first son did the father's will. Yet the first son undeniably represents repentant sinners. Those moral outcasts that these leaders looked down on.

The leaders look very much like the second son, in that they did not take heed to the message of the kingdom.

So, they condemn themselves.

**V 31**, *Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.*

**Tax collectors and Prostitute.**

**Why Jesus chose these two categories?**

Because the religious leaders hated them the most.

**Tax collectors:**

As for as the Israelites the worst of the worst are the Tax collectors because they have betrayed their own people and join hands with the enemies, the Romans.

No one likes to pay money to the government. Especially to the oppressive government of the Roman Empire. Those who

collected the taxes for such a government took the entire blame for public displeasure.

The tax collectors in the Bible were Jews who were working for the hated Romans. These individuals were seen as traitors to their own countrymen.

Rather than fighting the Roman oppressors, the publicans were helping them and enriching themselves at the expense of their fellow Jews.

The tax collectors cheated the people they collected from. They would use any means to collect more than required and keep the extra for themselves. Everyone just understood that was how it worked.

**Luke 19:8**, *Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."*

The confession of tax collector Zacchaeus displayed his past dishonesty.

The tax collectors were wealthy as well. They were rich in society. This further separated them from the lower classes, who resented the injustice of their having to support the publicans' lavish lifestyle.

The tax collectors, excluded as they were from society, formed their own circle, further separating themselves from the rest of society.

So, for this reason the religious leaders will not associate themselves with tax collectors.

The pharisees had a disdain view of the tax collectors.

**Luke 18:10-11**, *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.*

The Pharisees communicated their disdain for tax collectors in one of their early confrontations with Jesus.

**Mark 2:15-16**, *Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi’s house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. <sup>16</sup>And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, “How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?”*

Even Jesus gave an example tax collectors as how they ought to treat a sinning brother.

**Matthew 18:18**, *And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

## **Prostitutes:**

Not a great profession.

The religious group they don't want to do anything with women and with a prostitute nothing!

In general, society itself had a very bad view of the prostitute.

**Luke 7:39**, *Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."*

We can witness the religious hypocrisy when they brought the women caught in adultery.

**John 8:3**, *Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst,*

## **Where is the man?**

We need 2 people to commit adultery.

**Why were tax collectors and sinners able to open their hearts and respond to the kingdom while the chief priests and elders were not?**

The tax collectors and sinners had reached rock bottom and realized that their lives were empty and meaningless.

They received the message of John the Baptist as well as from Jesus and the respect that they did not receive from any of their contemporaries.

In Jesus, they found life as it was meant to be.  
Jesus offered them hope, which they never had.

The word of God to the prophet Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 18:27-28**, *Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. <sup>28</sup>Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.*

Now this parable can be applied quite broadly, but in this context, Jesus applies it specifically to John the Baptist's ministry

John the Baptist is the subject of the argument at this point between Jesus and the leaders of Jerusalem.

**Matthew 21:25**, *The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’*

Jesus asked the question about John the Baptist.

Now Jesus answers them with John the Baptist as well.

**V 32**, *For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.*

Tax collectors and prostitutes even though they had said no to God, they believed John and repented.

**Matthew 3:1-2**, *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,<sup>2</sup> and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”*

**Matthew 3:7-9**, *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?<sup>8</sup> Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,<sup>9</sup> and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*

The Pharisees even though they had said yes to obey God, they did not believe John was from God. So, they didn't do what he said.

Although John came in the way of righteousness, that is, he was righteous and preached a righteous message from God, they rejected him.

**V 32**, *when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.*

Even after they saw others respond, they rejected him. They would not change their minds about him and heed his message of repentance.

They blew it twice with John, just like they were blowing it with Jesus as they spoke with him.

The Pharisees and religious leaders disdained John because of several of his practices.

First, he was **baptizing people** in the middle of nowhere. Baptism was usually reserved for the temple area, and the Pharisees regularly practiced washings for purity. Water baptism occurred for proselytes who converted to Judaism.

But using water baptism to prepare the way for the Messiah and to call people out on their sin issues was not normal.

John the Baptist didn't follow in the footsteps of his **Levitical father** who was a priest in the Temple. Instead, he rejected that approach and did his own thing out in the middle of nowhere.

He caused a lot of issues with the Roman-placed leaders of his day. His preaching was not something they could smooth over with the Roman officials.

**Matthew 14:1-5**, *At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus<sup>2</sup> and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."<sup>3</sup> For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.<sup>4</sup> Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."<sup>5</sup> And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.*

When they asked him if he was the Messiah that he would cause even more trouble. False messiahs had been rising up in Israel for many years. They always caused trouble with Rome.

Most of all, I think their disdain for him was the same as it was for Jesus. **He became very popular**, and they wanted to be the popular teachers of Israel. They didn't want to share the limelight with anyone else whether he was from God or not.

The disdain of the religious leaders for John the Baptist was most likely a combination of all these factors. John was no friend of anyone in the religious hierarchy of Israel.

He preached against them, called them a brood of vipers, and saw them as against the move of the Spirit in bringing Jesus the Messiah to Israel.

## **Conclusion:**

### **How do the character traits of the two sons differ?**

#### **1. The character of each son is vastly different.**

One son is independent, disobedient, and insolent, but after thinking about his ways, returns to carry out his responsibility.

The second is a big talker, full of promises but no action.

In these two men, Christ describes, on the one hand, sinners of all types, who, when convicted by John the Baptist and Himself, turned away from their iniquities, repented, and obeyed God.

On the other hand, are the scribes, Pharisees, and other self-righteous people who feign a zeal for the law but will not receive the gospel.

## **2. Why does the first son regret his disobedience?**

Both sons hear the same command: "Son, go work today in my vineyard."

Parents should not raise their children in the destructiveness of idleness.

Similarly, God commands His children to work, though we are all heirs. Generally, the first reaction of a sinner to God's truth is "I will not!" which shows the enmity between man and God. The disobedient son represents those who have no desire to make an effort to obey God.

They neither fear God nor pretend to, seeing no immediate reward for their efforts. Although hypocrisy may exist in other areas of their lives, they are not hypocritical in their stance toward God. They flat out reject Him!

Eventually, when called, they realize that true happiness is to work for God to produce eternally rewarding fruit.

## **3. Why does the second son not go to work in his father's vineyard?**

The second son deceitfully professes respect and obedience, but he never does his duty.

The contradiction between his words and his work exposes his major character flaw, hypocrisy. It is harder to convince a hypocrite of his true state than a flagrant sinner because, in deceiving himself. The hypocrite follows his own standards and form of godliness.

Contrarily, the flagrant sinner knows he is evil.

Many in mainstream Christianity profess to know God but deny Him in their works.

They appear pious at church, but their personal lives are riddled with sin. They are living a lie, and out of their smooth mouths their deceitful hearts speak.

Their efforts produce the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit.

The second son does not go to work because he lives for the moment and never comprehends his father's ultimate plan, its wonderful results, and its long-term benefits.

#### **4. Since both sin, why does the openly disobedient son eventually did the will of his father?**

The sons' ultimate actions reveal their difference.

The first son, after open refusal, repents of his sin and goes to work for his father. He overcomes and changes from bad to good.

After experiencing the negative results of sin, he yields to God's instruction, changing direction and doing as his father commanded him, the fruit of his repentance.

The proof of our repentance comes to light when we comply with the Father's will and do good work with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The result is the production of the fruit of the Spirit.

### **5. Why do the Pharisees not recognize true righteousness?**

John the Baptist proclaimed the truth and lived it, but the Pharisees rejected John's witness and professed their own righteousness while living unrighteously.

In this parable, Jesus distinguishes those who generally knew the way of God (Jews) from those who did not (Gentiles).

The Jews initially appeared righteous, having the revelation of God and the ordinances of justice established among them.

The Gentiles were initially ignorant of righteousness, the way of God and were sinful in all their conduct.

## Application:

### a) Are you a "doer" and not a "sayer"?

**Matthew 7:21**, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

The doing of the will of God is the one thing needful.

In giving The Great Commission before His ascension to heaven.

**Matthew 28:20**, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in terms of obedience.

The doctrines of "Hyper grace" and "easy believism" have created a generation of "sayers" and not "doers".

Many profess Jesus as Lord, but then don't do what He says.

**Luke 6:46**, *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"*

They are like the second son, who says he will do the father's will, but doesn't.

This is a word to us not just the ancient leaders of Israel. We must come through on our commitments to God.

## **b) Faith in God.**

Misunderstanding the doctrine of "salvation by grace through faith".

Many people have concluded that requiring obedience to God's command is "legalism" or "salvation by works of merit".

Yet nothing could be further from the truth!

Keeping the commandments of God is essential to salvation.

What we must remember is that when we keep God's commandments, we in no way earn or merit salvation.

We simply do that which is our duty to do, and always remain "unprofitable servants" saved by grace.

**Luke 17:10**, *So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'*”

**Titus 3:4-7**, *For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But*

*when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup>not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Yet, we still "should be careful to maintain good works"!

**Titus 3:8**, *This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.*

The "religious leaders" in Jesus' day rejected the counsel of God for themselves in not accepting John's teaching for the need for repentance and baptism.

The reason they thought that they had good "theological grounds" for not heeding the simple commands of God given through His preachers

Even today there are many people (even "tax collectors" and "harlots") who will enter the kingdom of God before many religious people do

### **c) Don't be self-righteous.**

We need humility so we don't become like the leaders of Jerusalem.

### **Who are the ones who will never repent?**

No.

Sinner do have a chance for them to repent.

The ones who will never repent are those who think they don't need to repent, who don't see the need, who think they are in the right.

You never get to a place where you can't receive God's message to you where you don't need to be open to repentance.

### **d) Good news for sinners!**

If you are here today and you have sin in your life, even bad sin and made terrible and shameful choices yet it isn't too late.

Jesus teaches that you can change your mind!

You can have a change within so that you believe the message and start to obey your heavenly father. It isn't too late.

Let me finish with David.

**2 Samuel 12:1-13,**

**V 7,** *Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.*

**V 13,** *So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*

God calls David a man after My own Heart!

**Acts 13:22,** *And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'*

What kind of "son" are you?

One who does the will of his Father?

Or one who says he will, but in the end does not?

How you respond to the commands of our Lord determines the difference!