

Untitled (15)

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Preacher: Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen.

Amen. So, the church father, St. John Chrysostom, is credited with once having said this. The road to hell is paved with the bones of priests, and the skulls of bishops are the lamps that light the way. All right, so, there is some debate over whether he said this exactly, but in any case, he said something along those lines, and that might sound harsh until you consider that he himself was a priest and ultimately became an archbishop.

Why would I start with that? I see a parallel there between what John Chrysostom was reported to have said and the parable that Jesus presents in this morning's gospel reading.

Keep in mind, Jesus is speaking in our passage in Matthew chapter 21 to religious leaders, the chief priests and the elders, who professed to be servants of God, but in reality were anything but that.

[1:46] And how do we know? Well, if they had been true servants of God, they would have believed in God's only Son, Jesus Christ. Instead, they only professed to be servants of God.

They opposed Jesus, and they had not believed the preaching of John the Baptist, who told them to repent and to believe on Jesus, who is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

But we're kidding ourselves if we believe that this problem, the problem of those professing to believe, actually being unconverted to Christ is a problem that only existed a long time ago.

It is a problem that has plagued the church throughout the ages, and one that we need to be aware of. Parable of the two sons that Jesus told the chief priests and the elders is for the church today and for us as believers today.

We need the warning that we find there. We also need the encouragement that we find there. We find both, as I think we'll see as we look and consider the parable.

[3:01] Let's look together then at the parable that Jesus tells and consider the difference between the two sons that Jesus talks about. Please look with me in Matthew chapter 21, starting at verse 28.

Remember again, the context of this parable is that the religious big shots had just tried to discredit Jesus and his ministry. Jesus said, In other words, we see two types of people in this parable.

The first son says he's not going to obey his father. He begins an open disobedience to his father.

Then he changes his mind after his disobedience, and he decides that he will obey his father.

On the other hand, the second son is basically the opposite. He says that he's going to obey his father. He gives the appearance of obeying his father, and then he never actually does.

He professes to be obedient to his father, but he never actually does it. It's all empty words, and that son ends his course, unlike the other son, in disobedience.

[4:37] Well, that's frightening, isn't it? I'm sure that it must have been striking to the original hearers of this parable.

Because Jesus brings it home in a way that undoubtedly would have been terribly offensive to them.

Remember, he's talking to respectable religious leaders, people who think of themselves as the best of the best when it comes to serving God. And this is what he says to them.

Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him.

But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him. So, again, Jesus was talking to people who were thought of and thought of themselves as the people closest to God.

[5:44] And this is what he says. You are not going to enter the kingdom of God. John the Baptist came to you, and he told you to repent of your sins and put your trust in the Lamb of God, and you did not do it.

All of your fancy titles and all of your professions to be godly are worthless. On the other hand, Jesus says, look at many of the tax collectors and prostitutes.

Jesus is saying, these people that you think of as the worst of the worst in society, these people that you think of as being the furthest from God, many of them heard the message to repent of their sins and put their trust in the Son of God, and they did it.

And so they are going to enter the kingdom of heaven, and you are not. You can see why this might have made the religious authorities so angry with Jesus that they wanted to crucify him.

Jesus is giving a firm warning to them. I think it's a warning that everyone who reads this passage needs to take to heart.

[7:03] We can profess and appear to be very religious to other people. We can do that and still be unconverted. That's a frightening thought, isn't it?

I want us to think about the two sons in the parable. What are the marks of the two sons, and how can they be identified? Well, since Jesus brings the hammer down by telling his hearers, with emphasis, about the son that said he was going to obey the Father, but didn't actually do it, let's start there.

Let's start with the danger of being the son, the one who professes to obey God but actually doesn't. The son, as we think about the application, who doesn't actually repent of his sins and put all of his trust in Christ, no matter how religious the son might appear.

What is the disobedient son's primary evidence of being disobedient, even if that son professes to obey God? I think it will help if we look in John chapter 6 where Jesus says this, Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

For on him the Father has set his seal. Then they said to him, What must we do to be doing the works of God? And Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.

[8:41] So the primary mark of obedience to the Father is believing in his only Son whom he has sent. That's the primary mark of the obedient Son.

So how do we obtain eternal life? Through believing in the one whom God has sent, through trusting in Jesus. That means acknowledging that you are a sinner. That means acknowledging that the only way that your sins can be forgiven, the only way that you can have eternal life, is because Jesus paid the penalty that your sins deserve when he died for you in your place on the cross.

That means then that the obedient Son is the one who puts all of his trust, not in himself or anything else, certainly not in how religious he appears to be, but he puts his trust in Christ alone.

The disobedient Son might be very religious, but he never actually does this. In other words, he is never actually converted.

Professing to be religious but not trusting in Christ, not believing the gospel, is of no benefit to us whatsoever. Jesus is saying that those who continue in that state will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[10:00] And the difficult thing, the hard part, is that we can profess to be Christians, we can be regular church attenders, and still be unconverted.

And this can happen in more ways than one. There was a study released recently that indicated that only an estimated 2% of American millennials, and that's my generation for the record, hold to a biblical worldview.

Only 2% of us. Biblical worldview, as defined by the Barna Group for the purposes of this study, includes believing that absolute moral truths exist, and that such truth is defined by the Bible, as well as a firm belief in six specific religious views.

Those are that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, God is the all-powerful and all-knowing creator of the universe, and he still rules it today.

Salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned. Satan is real. A Christian has a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with other people.

[11:11] And the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings. To put it bluntly, in other words, only 2% of the people in my generation believe in the absolute basics of biblical Christianity.

If you're not a millennial, before you pat your generation on the back, I have some figures for you as well. Only an estimated 9% of American elders, defined as those over age 75, and baby boomers, hold to a biblical worldview.

Only an estimated 5% of American Gen Xers hold to a biblical worldview. And consider this figure. From a study conducted from 2018 to 2019, 65% of Americans identify themselves as Christian. Consider those figures side by side for a minute. I haven't done the math, but what becomes apparent is that there is a very large number of people in our country who consider themselves Christian, but don't believe the gospel.

That's the painful conclusion. We can call ourselves Christian, but if we don't believe the gospel, we are unconverted, and we are like the son who claims to be obedient, but isn't.

[12:36] That is a frightful place to be. That can also happen in subtler ways. What was the obvious sin of those religious leaders whom Jesus rebuked so firmly in this morning's parable?

It seems apparent to me that it was pride and self-righteousness. Not just any kind of pride and self-righteousness, but religious pride and self-righteousness. Of course, the priests, high priests, and the elders, they thought they were obedient, that they would enter the kingdom because they were obedient, unlike those sinful tax collectors and prostitutes over there, right?

But the converted person acknowledges that we cannot earn salvation, that we are not good enough to do that, that we are sinners, and that we can only receive salvation as a gift of God's grace through faith in his son, Jesus Christ.

Part of the trouble is that it is possible for us to say that with our lips, that we believe that without actually believing it. To say that we believe the gospel while really having a prideful heart that trusts in our own righteousness.

You can be a pastor and do that, which is why I started with the quote that I did. You can be an active church member and do that. In other words, you can appear very religious and still be lost.

[14:06] Reminded of what C.S. Lewis says in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, Lewis identified pride as the gravest sin of all.

He writes this, In God, you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself.

Unless you know God as that and therefore know yourself as nothing in comparison, you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God.

A proud man is always looking down on things and people. And of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you. That raises a terrible question.

How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? I'm afraid it means that they are worshipping an imaginary God.

[15:15] They theoretically admit themselves to be nothing in the presence of this phantom God, but are really all the time imagining how he approves of them and thinks them far better than ordinary people.

That is, they pay a penny worth of imaginary humility to him and get out of it a pound's worth of pride towards their fellow men. I suppose it was of those people Christ was thinking when he said that some would preach about him and cast out devils in his name only to be told at the end of the world that he had never known them.

Ouch. Those religious leaders who were rebuked by Jesus as being sons who said they would obey and then didn't were at the end of the day worshipping an imaginary God because they pridefully trusted in themselves instead of Jesus.

We too can call ourselves Christians yet end up worshipping an imaginary God because we trust in ourselves instead of in Jesus alone.

That's the hard news. Shifting gears. What about the son who said that he wouldn't obey his father and then changed his mind?

[16:45] Jesus identified the tax collectors and the prostitutes who believed the gospel with the son.

To his hearers the tax collectors and prostitutes would have been thought of as the worst sinners imaginable. Yet Jesus is saying that those tax collectors prostitutes and sinners who heard the gospel and believed it and put their trust in him are the sons who said they would not obey and then changed their minds and that those sinners who were converted to Christ will inherit the kingdom of

God.

Think of it this way to understand the impact of what Jesus is saying. Think of the worst sin you can possibly imagine. Whatever you think that is.

And now understand Jesus saying that people who do that whatever it is will be forgiven of all their sins will become children of God will be transformed by God's spirit and will go to heaven if they come to Jesus.

That's striking isn't it? You want to know what's really striking? Everyone who will enter heaven is like the son who disobeyed and changed his mind.

[18:17] Everyone who will enter heaven is like the prostitutes and the tax collectors who heard the gospel and believed it. Because friends at the end of the day we have all disobeyed God all of us we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory that's true of every single one of us in this room this morning and that is true of every person who has ever lived with the one exception of Jesus.

Whether we have been dishonest like the tax collectors that Jesus alluded to or sexually immoral like the prostitutes that Jesus mentioned or self-righteous like the religious leaders that Jesus rebuked we have all sinned.

It's been said that the gospel has a way of comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. The gospel has a way of afflicting the comfortable because the gospel tells us no matter how satisfied we are with ourselves in our own goodness we are wrong in our assumption that we are good people.

We are sinners and as long as we are unwilling to acknowledge that we are sinners we will not have eternal life. But the gospel also comforts the afflicted.

The gospel is good news to those who know that they have sinned who know that they are broken because the gospel says no matter what you have done confess your sins come to Jesus and you will find forgiveness in Christ and him crucified.

[20:13] Jesus died for sinners. Died for all kinds of sinners.

everything everyone from crooked tax collectors that he mentioned to even self-righteous and prideful people.

And he calls sinners to believe in him he calls us to believe in him and God's word tells us this that everyone who hears the gospel and believes has eternal life and will not be condemned and will not come under God's judgment that everyone who hears the gospel and trusts in Jesus has passed from death to life.

So friends let's repent of our sins and believe the gospel this morning. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen.