

# The Parable of the Two Sons

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[ 0 : 01 ] Let's read God's Word now in Matthew's Gospel and chapter 21. Matthew chapter 21, I'm reading from verse 18.

In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry.

And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, May no fruit ever come from you again.

And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree wither at once? And Jesus answered them, Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen.

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith. And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching and said, By what authority are you doing these things?

[ 1 : 25 ] And who gave you this authority? Jesus answered them, I will also ask you one question. And if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.

The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man? And they discussed it among themselves, saying, If we say from heaven, he will say to us, Why then did you not believe him?

But if we say from man, we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We do not know.

And he said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. What do you think? A man had two sons, and he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today.

And he answered, I will not. But afterwards he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, I go, sir, but did not go.

[ 2 : 33 ] Which of the two did the will of his father? They said the first. Jesus said 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 afterwards change your minds and believe him.

Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard, and put a fence round it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.

When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get this fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

Again he sent other servants more than at first, and they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect my son.

[ 3 : 43 ] But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? They said to him, He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him the fruits in their seasons.

Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on

anyone, it will crush him.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

[ 4 : 58 ] Amen, and may God bless to us this reading of his holy word. I'm going to sing again from Sing Psalm, Psalm number 77. It's on page 100 of the Psalm book, Psalm 77, and we'll sing from verse 6 to verse 12, the tunister cathro.

Psalm 77, verse 6. The tunister cathro.

The tunister cathro. Thou lie. I will recall the Lord's great deeds.

Your works of long ago. I'll meditate on all your acts. Your mighty deeds. I'll show the tunister cathro. These verses 6 to 12 of Psalm 77. We stand to sing throughout the watches of the night.

My songs I call tonight. Throughout the waters of the night, my songs I come to mind.

[ 6 : 34 ] I wonder deeply what I've heard, and I'll answer trying to find.

Forever will the Lord be gay, and never show His grace.

And He withdraw His faithful soul, and the earth will be His face.

For all time has its promise in, is God no longer kind.

And see in His great practice, O passion from His mind.

[ 7 : 54 ] Then through my heart, there came this love, on this I will rely.

The years of the heart, my child of God, of Him who is most high.

We'll recall the Lord's great deeds, your words of love and hope.

I meditate upon all your hands, your mighty deeds I show.

Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew chapter 21, reading at verse 28.

[ 9 : 22 ] Just two or three weeks ago, at the prayer meeting, we looked at this at verse 28. And we looked at it with regard to the sort of a challenge to the believer in the word, Son, go and work in the vineyard today.

And I did say that it was something worth looking at, again, in the light, really, and putting it in its proper context of Jesus addressing, really, the scribes and the Pharisees and such like of the day. So we'll read verses 28 to 32. What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today.

And he answered, I will not. But afterwards he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, I go, sir, but did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father? They said the first. Jesus said to him, truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will go into the kingdom of God before you.

[ 10 : 36 ] 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 afterwards change your minds and believe him.

Jesus' ministry at this point was becoming increasingly difficult. And all the time people were out trying to trip him up and trying to get hold of him.

There had been attempts, there were attempts being made to capture him, to arrest him. And constantly the leaders were determined to get him.

We find that at the very end of the chapter, it tells us there that although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds because they held him. That is, the crowds held Jesus to be a prophet. And one of the reasons why the scribes, the Pharisees, the religious leaders hated Jesus was because he didn't spare them.

[ 11 : 43 ] And they couldn't understand why he seemed to sympathize more with the down-and-outs, to sympathize more with those who were looked down on in society.

We read of two specific groups, the tax collectors and the prostitutes. And it seemed that Jesus had more place and more time for them than he did for the religious leaders.

And the scribes, the Pharisees, and the elders, and those in authority were incensed at what was happening. Because not only did Jesus seem to accept these people, the kind of people that they, the Pharisees, scribes, would have no dealing with whatever.

But they couldn't understand how this man, who was a religious leader, would accept them and would welcome them.

And so there was this growing resentment against Jesus. But of course we know that one of the, that the great difference was that those who were, as you would almost say, the outcasts of society, the prostitutes and the tax collectors, were people who had come to discover their own need.

[13:03] They had come to see their own sin. And they had come to see Jesus as the one who could forgive their sin. They saw that their lives were in a mess.

And they saw that there was healing and help for their brokenness in Jesus. And they came by way of repentance. They came with sorrow in their heart.

And they were all received when they came like that by Jesus. But sadly that was lacking in many, not in all of the Pharisees and the scribes and the rulers, but it was lacking in many of them.

And they were riddled with self-righteousness. They thought they were superior. They looked down their spiritual noses on other people. They were the elite.

And in fact, Jesus highlights, when he talks about the Pharisee and the publican, he highlights in prayer the difference between the two.

[14:02] We find that the Pharisee was one who prided himself on how good he was. And his prayer was simply a telling to the Lord of how good he was.

And thanking the Lord that he wasn't like other men. Particularly like that publican over in the corner. We've always got to remember the Lord knows our hearts.

And he knows if we are sitting in judgment upon others. Particularly in worship. And it's a very serious thing if we ever come to God's house. And we have an attitude of condemnation in our heart towards others.

If we are ever looking down upon others. Because we see that Jesus is so accepting of all those who will come to him.

And come to him by faith. Now, Jesus is highlighting here the situation. And it's a situation, although it was for that particular day, it is still as relevant and as real for us here today.

[15:08] And Jesus, as we said, we're looking at this as he said, on Wednesday two or three weeks ago. And we looked simply at these words, Son, go and work in the vineyard today. And we applied that on the Wednesday night.

Simply, we're looking at the work, at the specific work that the Lord gives us. A great challenge to work for him in his vineyard. But tonight, let us look at it as we have it here.

And we find that this man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today. And he answered, I will not. And here we have really a very clear picture of the defiance that is within the heart of men and women and boys and girls naturally.

A defiance against God. God, remember, has claims upon you and me. We reflected upon that this morning, that God has made everything.

He has made it for his own good pleasure, for his own glory. And we must never lose sight of that fact that God has ordered your existence in this world.

[16:21] He made all things for himself. That means you and me. And if we lose sight of that fact, then we lose sight of our real chief purpose in this world, which is to glorify God.

And that is why it's so important for us to stop and to hear what the word is saying. Because so often we get caught up with life and we just live life as we're used to it.

We live life according to ourselves. We live life according to all the pressures that are upon us in life. And we live life according to how the general way of things is.

So often instead of hearing and seeing and understanding what the word says. And ultimately, we've said this often enough before, but this is one of the great themes of the Bible, that our life is not ultimately about ourselves, but it's about God.

And we've always got to get back to this, to understand that my life as I live it, where I am here today, is ultimately about God, because he is our maker and he has a claim upon our life.

[17:37] One day, you and I are going to have to stand before the Lord and to give an account of our life. And he's going to say to us, I made you for myself.

What did you do with your life for me? And that's an incredibly challenging thought. But that's what the word of God does.

It challenges us. And we don't have a right to turn away from it and say, well, actually, I don't like to hear that. I don't want to be reminded of these things.

These things make me feel uncomfortable. I would rather not know these things. Well, God in his mercy has revealed them to us.

It is in mercy. Wouldn't it be an awful discovery at the end of our days to discover this truth too late? But it's not too late, because the Lord has revealed these truths to us.

[ 18 : 42 ] So we see that the natural reaction to the claim of God is, I will not. My friend, if you are still outside the kingdom, you are proof to that very fact.

I will not. The prodigal would rather feed the pigs in a country full or bereft of food.

He would rather feed pigs in a day of famine than return to the father's house. The father's house had had everything.

He would rather be sitting with the muck of the pigs, eating their food, than return home. It's madness. And yet, that's exactly what the human heart is like.

Saying, I will not. I will stay where I am. I do not want to bow before the claims and before the authority of God.

[ 19 : 53 ] Leave me to myself. And that's really what Jesus is talking about here. And so there is this, in a sense, there's this initial and immediate rejection of the claims of God upon our heart and life.

You see, we know that the claims of God are going to involve for us a change of life. It's going to involve for us working for God.

It's going to involve for us an awareness that God has that claim upon our heart and life and that it's his to choose for us how we will work for him and serve him.

And you know, although we were made to work at a spiritual level, what is natural to us is laziness and sloth. There is this sense of just leave me alone.

And sin is always pictured as laziness and sleepiness and carelessness in the Bible. And so, as the proverb says, yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.

[ 21 : 08 ] In other words, don't disturb my world. But we've also got to remember that if we are outside the kingdom, that all the factors of this world are working together to keep us outside the kingdom.

There's not only the natural response of our heart, which is rejection of God, but Satan is at work. Satan who blinds people's eyes.

Satan who is like he pulls the spiritual shutters, he keeps them closed. They are already closed by nature. Satan, it's like he's applying glue to it.

Super glue so that the eyes will not be opened in order to see. There's only one who can open the eye. That's Jesus. And that's why church is dangerous to Satan.

That's why Satan hates seeing you or anybody come to church. Because faith comes by hearing.

[ 22 : 14 ] And hearing comes by the word of God. And it is as a word is read and as a word is preached that people's hearts can be stirred up and Satan knows that.

And that is why the enemy of our souls will be at work whenever we come to church. And he will try to distract you. Church is an amazing place for a wandering mind.

And so often we drift off in church. So often we fall asleep in church. So often we plan our future, our holidays, our buildings, our work, our future, church is an amazing place.

It would be an extraordinary thing if we could paint all the pictures of what has been done and planned and thought of as we sit in church. And Satan is often at the background.

He will do anything. Jesus shows that in the parable of the sower where the birds came and plucked up the seed. The good seed was being sown and the birds were coming and plucking up the good seed so it wouldn't go down into the ground.

[ 23 : 30 ] And Jesus tells us that's Satan. That's what Satan is doing. Wherever the good seed is being planted, Satan is there plucking up. My friend, pray.

Pray that your hearts will be kept so that you will hear God speaking to you tonight. So that you won't be sidetracked. so that his word will not be taken from you.

And again we've got to remember that there's all the power and the lure of this world which is again against the soul. And again often when people look at the glory of this world and again they look at the gospel, the way of the gospel, the way of the kingdom seems so bland compared to the spectacular glories and ways of this world.

But what we've got to remember is that we're only seeing a little of the picture. We're only seeing a wee bit of the way through. We're not seeing the finished product.

We're not seeing the glory that will be. If we could get one moment's glimpse into the glory that will be, all the glory of this world put together would fade and disappear.

[ 24 : 46 ] Don't get over caught up with the cares of this world. You remember when Jesus gave the parable of the great supper, that those who were originally invited, that they all refused the invitation.

And one was so caught up with his plowing, another was so caught up with his field and his land, another was so caught up with his new wife, that they all said, well look, you're going to have to excuse me, I cannot come.

All good, nice, proper, legitimate things. I think we've said it before, it is reckoned that more people are lost through a wrong use of right things than selling themselves, as it were, into what we would say, into recognized sin.

A wrong use of right things. In other words, becoming overburdened, overconcerned with the cares of this world. And Jesus warned that again in the parable of the sword. He said the cares of this world are like weeds that entangle the good seed that's growing up and they choke them.

You watch my friend that this world doesn't choke the good seed that is being planted into your heart. heart. You've heard the word.

[ 26 : 15 ] Some of you have heard it for years and years and years. You know it by heart. You have learnt sections of God's word. You have heard verses so often that you could repeat them blind.

You know these truths but you know it's never really gone down into your heart.

Don't allow all the cares of this world to strangle that good seed. So we find anyway that this son first of all he refused I will not.

And we see the absurdity of that when we apply that to ourselves. Because as we mentioned already it shows us the incredible rebellion against God.

God who has to claim upon our life and we are saying no I will not. But it also shows when God makes this claim upon our life tonight it shows incredible ingratitude.

[ 27 : 20 ] I cannot think of anything worse than to refuse God's son tonight. Here we are by nature sinners.

By nature under the condemnation of God. God says over your life and my life as we are by nature condemned because of our sin.

That's the way we were born into the world. We can't help it. It's not that at a particular stage in our childhood that we decided one day ah I want to become a sinner.

No we were born sinners. That's the way we came into this world. Even in the womb we went wrong, because it's just how we are because of the sin of our first parents.

It just runs through generation after generation. Every single person comes into this world like that. So we're under condemnation. But God in his message says do you know what I want to do?

[ 28 : 22 ] I'm going to send my son. My only begotten son. The second person of the Godhead I'm going to send him into the world. And he's going to come as a man.

He's going to take human nature. And he's going to identify himself with the human race. He's going to walk amongst them. And he's going to share with them.

And he's going to minister to them. And he's going to teach them. But above all he's going to become a sacrifice for sin. He is going to take their sin.

The curse of their sin. The punishment of their sin. He's going to take it upon himself. He will die for them. And the son said I'll do it.

And so Jesus came into this world. And he did all that. And God says I so love the world. I gave my only begotten son.

[ 29 : 23 ] I couldn't do more to save you. people say not interested. That's what people say to God.

I'm not interested. I don't want your son. I hear about what he did in Calvary. But it doesn't interest me.

I'm just going to walk away. I cannot think of greater ingratitude than that. but that's what people do. And then again when you think of it logically it's the maddest thing that any person could do.

You see in life normally we're always working towards what is good for us. It's a pretty strange person who goes through life and is determined to make things go bad.

In fact we know there are some people and we talk about a self destruct button. And there are some people who seem to be always pressing that self destruct button.

[ 30 : 34 ] And you look at their lives and you say I wish they didn't do that. Because they seem to have a total disregard for their own well-being and even for their own life.

And your heart goes out to them and you feel for them. Because it's illogical. It's not natural. The natural thing in life is that you want to do what will be good for you.

For your well-being. And if that is how we go through life, so that we do the sensible things, so that that's why we eat sensibly, that is why we don't get all the furniture together in the middle of the floor and light it to keep ourselves warm, we'd say that's mad.

Nobody would think you're doing that. You don't go to bed and decide at night, I'm going to leave every door open and every window open and if anybody feels, let anybody who feels like it come and take whatever in the house, that's the way I want to live.

You'd say to yourself, that's a strange person. We do sensible things. But here is one thing where people have chosen not only to be, not to be sensible, but to be utterly mad.

[ 31 : 48 ] God is saying, listen, you're going to die. Your soul is going to die. Your soul because of your sin is going to be lost.

I am sending, I have sent my son, here is a way of salvation. Here is Jesus who is described in the word as a great physician, like the great doctor, the one who can heal you, the one who has done it all, he's got a great future and glory for you.

People say, no thanks. It doesn't make sense when you look at it logically. And yet that's what people are doing. It seems so mad.

And that's what this son did. When his father said to him, go and work in the vineyard, he said, I will not. However, this story teaches us that an initial refusal can be changed.

Because we see that the son has a change of mind. But afterwards, it says, he changed his mind and went. I don't know what happened.

[ 33 : 00 ] Maybe as he went away, he said, I'm not going to do that. And it's hard, it's hard. And he says, I'm not going to do it. But as he goes away, he begins to reflect. And I don't know what prompted, it doesn't tell us what exactly happened.

But he had a complete change of mind. And we find him going off and working in the vineyard. And you know, one of the most important things for us to do is to stop and to consider.

And if you have never stopped and considered, if supposing you've been coming to church for years, and you're hearing, you're saying to yourself, ah, it's the same things, hearing it week in, week out.

And you kind of, it's just like a stream. If you live in a house beside a stream, it's gurgling by. I remember when I went to Glasgow the first year for a while, I was living beside one of these wee rail tracks.

And a train used to go by about six in the morning. And the house used to shake where I would.

And I was saying, this is unbelievable. I'll never, ever, ever get used to that.

[ 34 : 10 ] But you know, within a few weeks, I didn't even hear it. It was just, it ran by. We get used to these things. And you know, it's possible to come to church and you just get used to it. It's happening and you're getting used to these things.

And you never really stop to consider and say, right, what is being said? Is this for me? Yes, it is. Stop and think. What is God saying to me?

And obviously, that's what that person did. Remember the prodigal son? That's when things began to change. It tells us when he came to himself and he began to think.

Very important to begin to think. Stop and think. That's what happened with the prodigal. For all the time he had just been caught up in everything that was happening.

And as we said at the beginning, he was even content to be eating the food of the pigs. But when he came to himself and he began to consider the situation, he thought, what am I doing?

[ 35 : 23 ] My father's house is full. Every good thing is there for me. And here am I languishing in rags with nothing but pig's food in muck.

This is mad. And he got up and he made his way home. For him it was difficult. For the father it was wonderful.

And here we have an exact same situation with this son who initially said I will not, but afterwards he changed his mind and went. And my friends, that's the greatest thing.

This is what we might term as repentance. Where there is a turning from and a turning to. Where a person is brought to see what the rejection really is.

And if you could see, my friend, the sin of rejection, it's a great sin. You could be here tonight priding yourself on your uprightness. And as a citizen of this town, you are a model.

[ 36 : 28 ] citizen, upright, in every way, in every shape, in every form. And rightly people speak well of you. But have you grasped the fact that in rejecting Christ, you are sinning.

It's a great sin. In fact, you could say it's the great sin. And so this man, he saw what I'm doing is wrong.

And he repented. It wasn't just a sort of, I better go. It's becoming this awareness that what I've done is wrong, and I must turn around.

And that's what we need to do, is turn to the Lord, and go to him. And if we have rejected him, do you know what happens when the Holy Spirit convinces you, and convicts you of your rejection of the Lord?

You're made aware, this is a great sin. And you're saying to the Lord, Lord, forgive me. I never realized how heinous a sin, how awful a sin that was.

[ 37 : 31 ] Lord, forgive me. Do you know what? He will. That's the wonder, the beauty of it. But just in a word we see, time's going, we see the other son, and he went to the other son and said the same, and he answered, I go, sir.

Literally in the Greek it is I, sir. In other words, what this son is saying, father, you can count on me. The other son, no, but look at me, I'm a good fellow.

If there's one person who will do what is right, you're looking at him right now. I'm your man. Go and work in the vineyard, it's good as done.

I'm just cut out exactly for the work. But you know, he didn't go. And Jesus turns to those that he was speaking, and he asks them really to be the jury.

And he said to them, which one at the end of the day, which one did the will of his father? And they said to him, the first. And it became very obvious who Jesus was speaking about here.

[ 38 : 39 ] And he was showing, it was very clear here, that here were the Pharisees. They were the second group. The prostitutes and the tax collectors and these people who were despised was like the first son, who went away into the far country, who rejected the claims of God.

And yet afterwards they came back and they actually did by coming. They were accepted by God because they came in sorrow, repenting of their sin.

The second group, the second son, is like the Pharisees who were full of their own importance and their own self-righteousness. But because they trusted in their own obedience, in their own works, in their own fulfilling and satisfying the law, they never came at all.

And you know, that's how awful it is. And Jesus is saying to them, you know, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. 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 afterwards change your minds. It's not a solemn thought.

[ 40 : 03 ] These people saw the ministry and they heard the ministry of John and they knew that John was a prophet and they feared him. the Pharisees and the scribes, they feared John.

They knew he was a prophet. And they heard his teaching and they saw the impact of his teaching. They saw the conversion of these people who were on the outside.

They saw it happen but they still did not believe. Can I say that that's a challenge to anybody still outside the kingdom?

You have seen lives changed. Maybe in your own family. Maybe in the workplace. You've seen people who are part of your group.

You've seen their lives being changed. Every changed life is the voice of God speaking. It's a sermon.

[ 41 : 05 ] It's saying this is real. What are you doing? I hope you won't be like the Pharisees and the scribes who saw that and yet did not believe.

It's a solemn thing to be part of and seeing and witnessing God at work and yet saying oh no. No. It's hardening your heart.

My friend today the Lord is speaking to you. And he's saying this is another opportunity. another day of grace. Will you come to me?

Let's pray. Let's pray.