

The Parable of the Two Sons

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[0 : 00] Chapter 21, the parable of the two sons. And we can read the parable again. 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. 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.

As you can see on the top of the Bible there, the name that's given to the parable is the parable of the two sons. But it could also be called the parable of repentance.

[1 : 08] And I think that seems, well, seems to me anyway, to be the all-important subject that is recorded for us here in this parable. Repentance obviously comes in many of the other parables, but it seems to be specifically mentioned in this parable.

Before I begin to look at the parable, one of the things I'd like to mention, that every one of us here tonight belong to one or other group.

And this parable speaks of two sons. And at the end of the day, you are like one or other of these sons. So I would like to ask you a question this evening at the beginning of this message.

As we go through the message, I want you to put yourself in the place of these sons. And I want to ask you, which son am I like? That is the question I will ask you at the end of this message as well. Now, in preparing this sermon, I was deeply impressed, firstly by the importance of this subject of repentance. I believe this to be a central doctrine in the gospel.

[2 : 23] The reason why many, I believe, are unconverted is that they've never really appreciated the place and the significance of repentance in the New Testament.

And the more I look at it, the more I see the centrality of this doctrine. Let me show you what I mean. To start with repentance is first and foremost a truth that we find clearly in the New Testament.

Especially when we look at it from a chronological order. The first teacher, who was the first teacher that appears in the New Testament?

John the Baptist, wasn't he? I need scarcely remind you as to what his message was. He preached, we're told, in Mark 1, 4, the baptism of repentance with the remission of sins.

Now the next in order, the next preacher in order, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself. What did Christ preach?

[3 : 34] Well, here's your answer. Again, this is Mark 1, 15. Now after that, John was put in prison. Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe the gospel. The same message, my friends. The same emphasis. Then we see Jesus sending out his 12 disciples.

And they're going out to preach and to heal. And this is how Mark describes their going out in Mark 6, 12. And they went out and preached that men everywhere should repent.

message is the same in all of the gospels. And then we come into the book of Acts where we see the formation of the Christian church as we know it today.

There specifically Christian preaching begins. And there we find the first recorded sermon. Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost.

[4 : 45] after Peter preached his sermon they came to Peter and they asked him what do we do Peter?

As a result of hearing the sermon he said to them repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Acts 2 verse 38 the same message.

And then we come to the apostle Paul one of the greatest preachers that ever walked on this earth. Acts 17:30 and the time of this ignorance God winked at and now cometh all men everywhere to repent.

We could go through the New Testament and there are many other places where this is mentioned in the same way. The emphasis is the same. It is a central message of the Bible.

We are reminded in this parable too that there is another reason regarding the importance of this truth because what it is telling us is it's the only gateway to heaven.

[5 : 56] There is only one way into heaven and that's through the finished work of Jesus Christ and repenting and believing in that finished work repenting of our sins. all must come this way.

Everyone without exception must come through repenting of their sins. The Lord makes it plain and clear no matter who you are whether you are royalty whether you are ministers of state whether you are Pharisees whether you are elders no matter who you are you must come like the parable says like the prostitutes and the publicans through the way of repentance.

That my friends is the starting point from which we must all come if we want to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Profession of religion your religious upbringing makes no difference.

The fact that the first son said yes to his father that makes no difference. He didn't go he was disobedient. It doesn't matter what our past has been. if we don't come in an attitude of repentance we are outside of the kingdom of God.

That is the message from this parable. We see the other son who refused and perhaps we don't know he may well have fallen deep into sin for a while but there came a point when he repented and that's the way we must come.

[7 : 34] We can say tonight that Christianity being a born again believer is coming in this way and this way alone through or it starts I should say with repentance.

repentance and we can put it even more strongly than that. It is plain and clear from scripture that the one thing that damns a person to a lost eternity in hell is failing to repent refusing to repent and that's the charge or I should say that's the charge that is raised against the chief priests and the Pharisees.

the Bible says they did not believe. The publicans and the harlots and the prostitutes they believed. In the same way when we look at the towns of Corassan Bethsaida and Capernaum the Lord Jesus says they failed to repent and sackcloth and ashes.

Now these were villages or towns where Jesus Christ spent many hours where he preached to them and where they saw miracles performed yet they failed to repent.

[8 : 52] There we see some of the reasons in the New Testament for this all important subject of repentance. It is the first truth that is preached and that is impressed upon the people.

It is the gate through which all must pass in order to get into heaven. Refuses refusal to repent confirms and condemns a person or damns a person to a lost eternity.

So you see this is a vital truth that is before us here this evening. Vital. A vital Christian truth. I suppose you could see it is not surprising that our national churches and others are failing today because this preaching is not central as it ought to be in their teaching and their preaching.

And I believe that is the cause of much of the state of affairs in our national churches today where we see numerical weakness and weakness amongst those who profess to be Christians.

My friends if we are wrong in the foundational truths of God's word how on earth can we build an edifice? The foundation must be right and this is a foundational doctrine the doctrine of repentance.

[10 : 19] So that raises a great question what is repentance? Now many people stumble at this point for many as long as they feel sorry after sinning they imagine that all is well.

I want to read a verse in Corinthians to you which really struck me when I read it in preparing this message and it reads like this in 2 Corinthians 7 verse 10 for godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret whereas worldly grief produces death.

Now that seems to me that there are two kinds of repentance there is a worldly repentance and there is a spiritual repentance that leads to life and what I see here is many people have this worldly repentance they feel sorry for doing something wrong but that to me is a horizontal sorry because

they have probably been found out and they feel sorry that they have been found out but there is no vertical and there is no mention of god and that they have wronged a holy god this is purely a worldly repentance and sadly that is true of so many people they think they are ok because they feel sorry for what they have done but that is not repentance then there are those as well who read far too much into this doctrine of repentance and fail to appreciate what the bible really says about it recently in fellowship we were mentioning this about john bunyan john bunyan for 18 months really could not grasp this doctrine of repentance and for 18 months he was under huge conviction and it affected his mind hugely there were times when he felt that he was being dangled over hell and he could smell and see the fire and brimstone he was in a torment that nearly drove him to despair there are others whom

I have come across who have spent sleepless nights concerned about their sin and very often they were trying to better themselves so that god would try and so that god may look at them more favorably but again that is not through repentance they're putting themselves through needless miseries and may cause themselves needless trouble and it's because they haven't grasped the new testament teaching on repentance well what is it well we're told in the parable in a very simple and a very direct manner so let us look at the parable and discover the principles of this doctrine of repentance what is repentance what does it imply that's the first question we could ask ourselves well clearly in the first place it's a change of mind and a confession that we've done wrong the father said to the son that's the first son he said son go to work in my vineyard he answered and he said I will not but afterwards he repented and he went now it's obviously that this first son had a change of mind but you can imagine when he said to his father I will not he was probably saying to his father what right have you to tell me to go into this vineyard what right have you to command me and as a result initially he didn't go but then he turned and he considered the matter my friends the first step in repentance is to think again about your own position in relation to the light of God's word you see he could have let the matter rest but he didn't for some reason or other we don't know what the reason was he returned to the question that the father asked him go and work in my vineyard but you see something was gnawing in his breast there was a conviction that came into his heart and he realized that he was sitting against his father instead of brushing it aside and ignoring it he plunged you know sometimes what we do when our conscience preaks us perhaps the gospel has been speaking to you at one time or another but instead of going to the father and seeking mercy and praying for forgiveness we've placed ourselves into business and we've spent time busying ourselves so that we could get out of our minds all together but not this first son and my friends the first step in repentance is always to think again just like the prodigal son who was eating the pig's swill and who realized his position and what he had done to his father and that's seen often in scripture you see once a person questions where he stands in the light of

[16:26] God's word there is hope for that person perhaps he might begin to come to church perhaps he might begin to want fellowship with other Christians in a sense that's the great effect of the gospel because one of the effects of the gospel is to ask men to think again as to where they stand in the light of God's word but you see that's not enough that is not repentance the man in the parable did not merely think about the question but he changed his mind there is a change of mind by this man and there is a confession of his former error he was honest with himself he no longer made excuses there's no excuse for this madness why am I doing this against my father and he changes his mind and my friends that's the first point of repentance you need to have faced yourself and your life are you trying to justify your stance tonight are you perhaps saying to yourself well I'm not as bad as others or perhaps you're making some excuse but my friends this is only the first step admitting that you're wrong but the first son now proceeds to admit to his father and to the whole world by changing his mind and doing doing what he first refused to do in other words the second part of repentance is acknowledging our sinfulness before a holy God and regretting that we've broken

God's law after all is this how I should treat my father same applies to our earthly father when we've done something wrong we feel guilt but imagine God who is holy and just and right and we break his law how we need to repent and flee from our sin look at the prodigal son when he really thought about his position or he say I am no more worthy to be called your son make me one of your hired servants in other words there was a sense of shame the same with the publican and sinners or the publican what did the publican do he wasn't like the Pharisee who was so full of himself but the publican beat upon his breast and in desperation he cried from a broken and a contrite heart

Lord be merciful to me a sinner and that's the second stage in repentance not only knowing you're wrong but realizing that you're wronged a holy God and regretting that you've wronged a holy God you've got to remember who God is God is the one who created us every good gift comes from God my my friends God could have could have destroyed us many times he sent his only begotten son into the world what a love God has for us sending his own son into the world to die for sinners such as we are he gave his all for us and my friends refusing to come to God and to think about these things is just throwing this in God's face surely you must agree with the publican and with all other sinners that we really have no claim on the love of

God you are entirely without excuse and that genuineness of regret is measured by the third principle that the Lord shows us in this parable the first son sees that not only he has wronged his father and he feels sorry for doing so but he proves and clinches it by actually doing what he formerly refused to do and this is in a sense is the acid test and the most important point of all for we do not truly acknowledge God and truly acknowledge our sorrow and our regret for sin against him unless we place ourselves entirely in his hands and that's the most difficult point of all for us and this is what remember the story of the young ruler he refused he was at the second point of repentance but he did not come to this final point he walked away from

Jesus and to say sorry is not enough for the things that you've done in the past that's not enough you must give tangible proof of obeying him in the present committing yourself in obedience to God as long as you live that's repentance because God desires to have your will he desires to have your all so he places this test at the very beginning and that's perfectly illustrated in this parable of the first son there is no hesitation by this first son he goes and does what he's been commanded to do why because his father asked him to do it that's why and God the heavenly father my friends is waiting for you and I just to do that now what does God want us to do that's the question well this is what this is God's reply to that question my friend this is the work of

[22 : 47] God that you believe on him and on him whom he has sent John 6 29 that is what God wants us to do my friend tonight that is the way to please God to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge Christ as the son of God and the saviour of the world he is the one who came down from earth who added to his person humanity in order for him to die on that cross at Calvary in your place and without Christ you are absolutely hopeless you have no hope for eternity you must be willing to pledge your life to Christ and to forsake sin my friend that is the final stage of repentance and even the best that you can offer

God is tainted with sin and is totally unacceptable to him our only hope is in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and that is the final stage of repentance perhaps you're waiting tonight for some experience or perhaps you're waiting to learn more about how Jesus can save you my friends will be waiting a long time because that's not what God requires of you tonight what God requires from you tonight is to believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ you will never understand it of yourselves it is only the spirit that can reel that truth to you and the fact that you reject him tonight is that you are not prepared you've been disobedient and what you're saying tonight to our holy father is I will not and if you're not a Christian tonight that's what you're saying to him remember tonight my friend you are here in this building by divine appointment and you're here to hear the gospel and you must respond to that gospel and we'll see that in a moment the Lord is asking you to take him at his word not for looking for signs he's wanting you to say that I believe

Jesus died for me I believe that God forgives for that reason and for that reason alone by putting my trust to the finished work of Christ are you ready to put your trust in Christ my friend you have not repented until you've done that but there's another son very briefly in this parable and this other son said I go sir but did not go you see he gave a nominal consent that he would go my friend how many people are in this church tonight and who are saying to God I go sir how many of you tonight have been coming to this church for years and who have heard the gospel explained to you and whose hearts at times have been moved and yet you're still in that same position of saying I go sir but you go nowhere perhaps there are times in this building when you felt really uneasy someone has been preaching the gospel here and he's been pointing at you personally and you've been saying hey that guy knows more about me than he ought to know and yet you've gone out of this building and you poured aside you've said

I go sir but didn't go my friend tonight be aware that the position you're in is of being a promising hearer and nothing more now I don't want to close this sermon this evening by speaking to your hard way my friend I don't know who you are or what you are but I love you and one of the reasons

why I stand in a pulpit is because I love you and I mean that from the depth of my heart and there's nothing I would want more than for you to know that Jesus that has changed my heart and my life many years ago and I long and I long perhaps some of you for many years in this church and I can see some of you you were here when

I was a boy my friends you've been saying over the years I go some but you haven't gone my friends the date tonight is the 18th of September 2016 oh my friends what a day that would be for you if this was the day or the night that you came to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Saviour I urge you tonight to cast yourself on the finished work of Jesus Christ because that is the way of salvation just to rest in Christ my friends let me tell you what your condition is like tonight let me illustrate it in this way just picture a burning house with a few stories well let's see two stories in it and there's this window on the second floor and all of a sudden we see flames coming out the window and a child coming out and hanging on the lintel of that window and below him is a man strong man and he is saying to this young man drop drop into my arms

[29 : 16] I will save you but I will catch you now it's no saving faith for the boy to believe that this is a strong man yes it's a help to his faith but it is faith when he drops into the arms of the man and is saved there you are tonight sinner you are clinging to your sins and the saviour is saying to you tonight drop drop or he's saying to you flee flee from your sins and come to me my friend it's not the doing it's failing to do that's the problem it's not working out your salvation you cannot do that it is trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ and my friend you could be as black as hell in this building tonight as black as anyone but you know by coming to

Christ in an instant you can be cleansed in an instant oh that the spirit might do that for you bringing you to trust in Christ oh let me close tonight by reminding you of the serious danger in which you are found if you are like the second son I go sir and you don't go well observe tonight my friends that you are sinning against the light do you know that there are degrees of punishment in hell and my friend you're a privileged person here tonight because you're under the sound of the gospel you are privileged because you're here hearing the gospel and probably heard it many times and what is happening is that you're hardening your heart but the fact that you're here tonight gives me hope and I'll tell you why because

Jesus says to me tonight in his word that whosoever believes on me I will in no wise cast out now do you understand what that word whosoever means or perhaps you're putting something into this word don't my friends it is quite clear what whosoever means that means you and I urge you to realize the perilous position you're in because I want to show you something here by illustration that could happen to you and I don't want it to happen to you tonight perhaps you're somebody who's been making vows over the years we were older or perhaps there are certain things that I need to do and as a Christian it might be difficult for me to do that but I'll wait and you've probably made vows well remember

Ananias and Sapphira God took their lives away and my friend every single vow that you've made over the years is recorded the Bible says in God's book of remembrance and you have no excuse when it comes to the day of judgment God does not forget and the other sad thing for me tonight is that perhaps you're hardening your own conscience that's a fearful thought my friend when a man has said in his heart continually I go sir and doesn't go let me illustrate that have you ever watched ice forming on a loch perhaps not so much but I used to see it in Germany often when I was stationed there because we used to go ice skating on the lochs when ice first appeared the loch would be as calm and smooth and then as the frost came on week after week day after day week after week the ice got thicker and thicker and thicker until we were skiing on it and driving over it my friends that film of ice is what is happening to you tonight your heart my friend is getting harder and harder and harder under the gospel perhaps the gospel has stopped speaking to you tonight oh my friend

I hope that's not true I had the sad privilege of being at the bedside of one of my own soldiers who was with me when I was converted in 1970 and who was moved himself because he was brought up in a Christian home and I was in Ragmore hospital about ten years ago at his death bed and over the years he had been given many opportunities to you can't leave it now is the accepted time now is the day of salvation perhaps you're saying tonight my friends you know the preachers today have lost their power the preachers today don't speak to me anymore the Bible doesn't speak to me through the preacher I seduced him my friend let me tell you it's not the preacher that's lost his power the charge my friend is not to the preacher but to the preacher's master

[35 : 15] God who hardens the heart that's a serious thought oh my friends that God would save you tonight from such judgment my friends common sense surely common sense and reason should tell you that my friends I urge you tonight to come to Christ whosoever will that's an amazing word come unto me all ye that are heavy laden and I will give you rest rest in Christ which is eternal or that God would save you because he's the only one that can do that and I would urge you tonight if the gospel has spoken to you tonight speak to someone or go on your knees when you go home and plead with the

Lord to have mercy upon you because you need to be brought into that same place as the publican and every single Christian that's here tonight was brought to that same place of desperation where we had to cry from a broken and a contrite heart Lord be merciful to me sir flee from the wrath to come oh my friends I urge you to come then Lord here's your prayer Lord I have broken my promises but you have not broken yours you have said you will not cast away who come to you in repentance he won't cast you away help me to turn from my sin and flee to Christ who is my only hope of salvation my friends not tomorrow not tomorrow tomorrow's never promised today now is the accepted time now is the day of salvation may the Lord bless these thoughts to us for Christ's sake and may he have the glory let us close in prayer eternal father we thank you for your word and we thank you for the gospel and we thank you oh Lord that we can repent and that we can come to you fleeing to

Christ oh Lord help us to confess our sins for you have promised that if we confess our sins you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness you've also promised in your word that whosoever will can come and in no wise you will cast out anyone who comes to you in that manner oh we pray that you would speak to someone here tonight and that some of those who have been here for years might have their hearts broken and may they come to Christ so hear and answer our prayers as we approach your throne for Jesus sake we ask it amen our closing psalm is psalm 130 in sing psalms and that's on page 173 what encouraging words are in this psalm my friends lord from the depths I call to you and that's where you must come from from the very depths of a broken heart lord hear me from on high and give attention to my voice where I for mercy cry you see many of the psalms are prayers and when you read the psalms you see how bold David was in his prayer life and we need to be bold too and then this last verse oh Israel put your hope in

God for mercy is with him a full redemption from their sins his people he'll redeem the whole psalm to God's praise and the trueness martyrdom Lord come the depths I call to you Lord hear me come on high and give and give attention to my voice when I for mercy cry for in your presence you can stand if you if you are sins before

God yet forgiveness is with you that we may fear in you Lord I wait my soul wait for the Lord my hope is in his word more than the world have reached for dawn my soul is far the Lord oh Israel put your hope in God our mercy is with him and glory redemption from their sins his people he redeemed let us close in prayer eternal father again we thank you for this opportunity that we've had this evening of studying your word and lord we pray that you would speak to us through it in a way that would lead us to repentance that each one of us those who are your children that we would have a real hatred for sin and those who are not yet in Christ that they might realize that this was a moment of appointment by you Lord to hear the gospel yet again

[42 : 04] Lord we plead that you would not harden their hearts but that you would give them a heart of flesh that would cry to you for mercy so hear us as we cry and pray that you would have mercy upon us for Jesus sake and now as we part one from the other may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all Amen Amen Sameays Amen Amen Amen Amen Vadim I Amen