

## Parable of the Two Sons

Good morning Southwest Family

Fellowship! We are going to be diving back into our Summer in the Parables series today and talking about the Parable of the Two Sons. Which by the way is different than the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we will talk about that one, just not today. The Parable of the Two Sons takes place in Matthew 21, when Jesus has entered Jerusalem. He has entered the Holy City which is full of religious leaders, elders and officials who are threatened by his authority and influence.

In order for us to understand this Parable we need to unpack what was happening in Jesus' ministry leading up to him telling this Parable. Like I said he had just entered Jerusalem and now he was beginning to have different interactions and confrontations with religious leaders and religious people. Also in this

chapter he went into the temple and flipped the tables because people had turned the temple into a marketplace. They were leveraging a holy place to be a place of greed and resource advancement. He righteously corrected them and acted in righteous anger to set the place back to what it was supposed to be. He immediately started loving on the crippled and the blind and healing them. The religious leaders saw this and were dismayed.

The authority of Jesus was challenged by the religious leaders later in this chapter and I believe we need to read this to help us fully understand what he was teaching in his Parable of the Two Sons, and why he was teaching it.

In Matthew 21:23-27 Jesus' authority was questioned,

23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority

are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

24 Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ 26 But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

27 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Jesus was constantly engaging with the chief priests, elders and religious leaders of Jerusalem. He wanted them to see the

wickedness of their ways and be renewed but their hearts were hardened. This was why they could not see by what authority he was teaching and doing these miracles by. Instead they were trying to trip him up, constantly questioning him, and trying to discredit the miracles and things he was doing. Jesus was prepared for their questions, their piety and their doubts.

He was not about to let their influence keep people from the love of God and the radical life change that could happen to them if they accepted Christ and what was about to happen on the cross. The religious leaders did not engage with Jesus or approach conversations with an open mind, if they had, his teachings and words could have enlightened them, opened their hearts and called for a heart change, but they were hardened and calculated how they responded as to not lose power, influence or status.

Understanding this confrontation in the temple sets up our Parable well, let's dive in and read,

Matthew 21:28-32

28 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

29 "I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

30 "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

31 "Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of

righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

This parable is the first of three that Jesus tells to the religious leaders and elders. Each are challenging and confronting them on their faithfulness, their attitudes and their pride. Jesus' time in Jerusalem this time has been marked with conflict between him and the religious leaders and those using religion for the wrong reasons.

This Parable is one of those that is not super straight forward and has a lot of confusion and misunderstanding around it, but its message is profound and important for us to understand.

Arland J. Hultgren in his commentary on The Parables of Jesus says this, "The first son refuses to work for his father. The refusal is not

only an outright rejection of the father's request, but an act of rebellion as well, which is an affront to the father. Later, however, that son changes his mind, and goes to work in the Vineyard. So the initial refusal is followed by actual obedience after all.

The father is here, as elsewhere, a metaphor, for God, and the Vineyard is here, as elsewhere, a metaphor for Israel. Each of the sons is a metaphor for the obedient and the disobedient within Israel, as will be developed as the Parable unfolds.

The second son assents to his father's request, but he fails to do what he was asked to do. Nothing is said about his changing his mind; that is not needed. He simply fails to carry out what he is supposed to do. But at a deeper level, he also breaks a promise.”

Obedience is more about deeds than words. We can say we are saved, we can say we are renewed, we can say we are changed but it is our actions that are fueled by our heart do not show this change we say we have, it is merely weightless and unworthy words.

The first son was rebellious and said no to his father, but felt a call for repentance, felt a need to change his mind and then did obey. The second son on the other hand was all talk and all words. He said he would work in the vineyard but did not follow through on his promise. His ambition was not backed up and therefore it was worthless.

We have to remember that Jesus is telling this story to the religious leaders, priests and elders. These people are strong in their feelings of righteousness, piety and feelings that they are in good standing with God. They believe

their adherence to religiosity and being “better” than others sets them apart.

They fail to realize that their words are merely folly. They are like the second son who says they will be obedient and work in the vineyard but do nothing. They say they love God and want to do his decrees but they do not adhere to what they say they will do.

That leads us into our first point for today, **Genuine obedience is not just about our words, it has to do with our actions and deeds.**

We can't just say we're saved by grace, or say that we love others, or say that we want to obey God and then not follow it up with actions and deeds. All of those things are reflections of the heart change we have received through grace.

It's not great to start like the first son, where we say we won't do something and then change our mind, but it is even worse to say we

will do something and not live up to our word. Especially when it comes to obeying God, extending grace and seeking faithfulness.

I remember growing up I had read this Parable and it made me immediately think about how I would handle chores with my parents. Maybe my dad had asked me to mow the lawn one summer day, and I annoyedly said no, because I wanted to play video games or hang out with my friends or do ANYTHING else. But then later on I decided to go do it and at least it got done. I did still tell him no, but at least I had a changed heart and helped out.

Or maybe my mom asked that while she was out shopping could I please vacuum the house and I say sure, but then I get stuck in my activity and out of nowhere I hear her car pulling into the driveway and I hadn't done it yet.. Yikes!

When I have always read this story it confuses me, I get caught up in the fact that

both sons were rebellious in a way, so it's hard for me to see either as doing what the father wanted. I looked at it literal, I took it at face value.

The reality though is that this was diving into being faithful and obedient and repentant. See if we receive grace and love from God and say we want to follow him but then we do not act out of a place of that grace or love, we are like the second son. We are rebellious and all words.

But if we first rebel against being obedient and faithful but then have a repentant heart and choose to faithfully and genuinely repent and obey, we are doing what the father wants. Our actions, our heart, and our deeds are showing a reflection of this forgiveness, love and repentance taking place in our hearts through Jesus. Because at the end of the day true genuine obedience is not just about our intentions or our words, it deals with our actions

and deeds. The High Priests did not understand this, they thought their words, their status, their knowledge and influence is what gave them righteousness and status, but their actions were fruitless and their heart was unwilling and unopened to change.

The religious leaders throughout Jesus' time in Jerusalem were constantly threatened by Jesus and his perceived authority. He is challenging their authority in the temple and in the religious space. For a long time these people have been the one's in charge and who dominate those areas but they know that Jesus has an authority there and they are trying to determine if he is the Messiah or thinks he's the Messiah. Both impact their prowess and place.

All of their questioning, challenging and rebuking come from a pride and a fear of losing their power and place in the community as important religious officials. They want to

discredit Jesus and try and find ways to do so, but Jesus is always able to calmly and comfortably diffuse their questions, actions and ambitions.

NT Wright has this to say about their interactions after the Parable of the Two Sons, "The first son, who rudely tells his father he doesn't feel like working today, but then does after all, stands for the tax-collectors and prostitutes. Their daily life seemed to be saying 'No' to God; but when they heard John they changed their mind and their lifestyle (in other words, they 'repented?'). The second son, who politely tells his father he will indeed go to work, but then doesn't, stands for the Temple hierarchy and other leaders. They look as though they're doing God's will, worshipping in the Temple and keeping up appearances; but they refused to believe in John's message, not only about repentance but

also about the Messiah who was standing unknown in their midst.

Now the Messiah himself is here to call them to account. Not surprisingly, they don't like it."

It's not about how our lives look, it's not about perception, we can all put on a face, a mask or an incorrect reflection of what our life or our heart actually look like. The second son and the religious leaders were great with their words, they were great with their intentions and displays of what their lives were like. Their actions and deeds on the other hand were lacking. Genuine obedience was not found in their hearts and actions.

John 14:12-16, explains to us what obedience is, "12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. 15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.”

If we love God and believe in him, we will want to obey, we will want to do the works Jesus does, we will want to be patient, kind, loving, just, faithful and obedient. If we love and believe in him we will want to genuinely obey him which comes with keeping his commandments, and the greatest commandments Jesus explains are to Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and to Love your neighbor as yourself.

Obeying God is desiring to do these things and doing them. And part of our promises that come with obedience and doing the works that Jesus did, is we are given a helper, the Holy

Spirit, to guide us, walk alongside us, and help us as we do all these things.

This leads to our second point, **Genuine obedience requires genuine repentance.** Repentance requires action. And it is attainable and necessary from the religious and the irreligious.

Our Parable of the Unforgiving servant last week taught on this idea of repentance. The servant was forgiven of an immense debt (or metaphorically sin debt) and that should have taught him to have seen his sin, been remorseful of it, want to rectify it, and would have rectified it by forgiving the fellow servant who owed him money.

Repentance means seeing your sin, your faults and your disobedience, being remorseful of it, meaning you don't want to do that anymore and you seek out to not do it anymore. You feel the righteous correction of God to not do it



anymore and then you want to make it right. Well Jesus made it right on the cross, so repentance is rooted in receiving and accepting the free redemption Jesus provides from his sacrifice and redemption on the cross.

And then seeing the forgiveness and redemption you have been provided leads you to desire to freely forgive and reconcile with others. That is repentance. It requires self-awareness, a heart change, action to live differently, and acceptance of what Christ has already done for us.

Saying your obedient to God and being obedient to God are two very different things and Jesus portrays that through this Parable. Perception also plays a part in this dynamic. The tax collectors and prostitutes seem like they have no place with a holy, pure and righteous Jesus or God. But they are the exact ones finding and living out of true obedience, rather

than these self righteous religious leaders who are closed off to Jesus because of their current earthly status.

Arland Hultgren explains this dynamic in his commentary on the Parables, saying, "It also speaks against the view that the ways and will of God are always evident to those who presume to be the custodians of the tradition - and that they are always obscure to those outside. What is so intriguing is that God often gets a hearing and response in the lives of people whom the righteous despise. These are people who make no claims of being righteous or religious, but who carry on daily tasks given them by God. Precisely when people do not try to be religious, but simply do the will of God through the normal course of living, they respond to God's call."

Genuine repentance is required of everyone, and it's never too late for repentance

for anyone. Status, religiosity and looking like you run with Christian fellowships have no merit in true obedience, repentance and faithfulness.

The ways and will of God are not exclusively offered or heard better from those deep in religious circles, God's will and ways are for everyone.

Just because I am a Pastor does not mean I am always able to evidently see the ways and will of God, and just because someone is not within the church or Christian fellowship does not mean the ways and wills of God are obscure to them. Jesus came and made a way for religious leaders, as well as tax collectors and prostitutes to find a way to serve and love God, to repent, to obey, and be renewed by Christ's sacrifice.

Being religious is not actually a call by God. Religiosity is a man-made thing, living life

out of grace, love, forgiveness, hope and the fruits of the Spirit are the call of God.

Religion is a social and cultural system, which is based on rituals, practices and organizations. Although religion is a human construct, it is often built around a god or a deity that people worship. Faith and belief in a same deity is what brings people together, and what makes them improve and enlarge their communities. Yet, the concept of faith does not necessarily have to be linked to religion.

Religion is the human-made construct we have created to help us congregate and interact to serve the same God. But our religiosity is not part of our faith. Faith is laid out in Hebrews 11:1, Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

I would encourage you to read that whole chapter. It does a deep dive into faith and outlines many key people in the Bible and their

display of faith. True faith requires true obedience and true repentance. It's rooted in trusting in God's promises and believing in and hoping in him, even though we may not see him. And that means we have to be open to God working in our hearts to change, be renewed and be open to being uncomfortable when following his will.

That leads us into our third point for today,

True faith requires us to be open to confrontation and correction from God and the Spirit.

Jesus is talking to these religious leaders and teaching them because he loves them and desires to see their heart and their mind renewed and changed. The fruit of their hearts and lives are bitter and resentful and power hungry. They look at Jesus as an adversary and a threat rather than a loving blessing like he is.

To better understand what Jesus was trying to teach them about faith let's go back a

bit in the chapter. Jesus is trying to find something to eat when he comes upon a fig tree. This is his interaction, Matthew 21:18-22,

“18 Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. 19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.

20 When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

21 Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

This story is less about the tree and its lack of fruit and more about the metaphor and the

teaching principal. I mean first of all Jesus miraculously withered the tree right before their eyes, showing his divinity. But furthermore he is saying that when your faith is not displaying the fruits of the Spirit, or the fruits of the grace you have received, that your life like this tree, it's not doing what its supposed to. But when you have a faith full of evidence of the fruits of the Spirit growing in your life, you would be able to tell a fig tree to wither or a mountain to throw itself into the sea.

You would be so rooted in the Spirit of God and in his grace and heart that if you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. You would be so rooted in repentance and seeking obedience that you would step in step with Christ. You would be walking with the Spirit and genuinely living out of the love you have received.

All of this requires a humble spirit that is open to being confronted, corrected, and reset. These religious leaders were not open to this. They did not have a humble spirit, they answered Jesus' questions in a way of "not tripping up" or not saying something wrong so they are cancelled or looked unfavorably upon by the masses. This whole chapter outlines multiple accounts of them trying to outsmart and outwit Jesus. Their interactions are not genuine, not rooted out of love or grace, they are rooted in contempt, jealousy and hate.

Jesus sees through the lies, through the deception and can see the true colors of their heart. It was like Jesus could see their heart and their motives as plain as day like it was an outward physical thing. It was a lot like how people could see Pinocchio's nose grow when he lied. Let's watch a quick clip. (1:39 clip)

Pinocchio couldn't hide his lies or his deception from those around him, just like the religious leaders couldn't hide their motives or deception from Jesus. They were not ready to be humbled or corrected. They felt their faith and practices were keeping them righteous and in good standing with God, so much so that with God incarnate right in front of them they couldn't unfog their heart from being open to the divine love and power, standing in their midst.

Correction and resetting often feels harsh, abrasive, and intense. But correction and resetting from God and the Spirit are wonderful things. It takes us out of danger, brings us closer into love, and allows us to encounter even more blessings through Christ. Because our heart's desire should be to want to be obedient and repentant and faithful. We don't want to be like the second son who told the Father we will obey

and serve in the field but turn around and don't do it.

We want to be faithful and be rooted in our faith to serve, obey and repent. We want to be humble and open to God's confrontation. This parable is a warning of humility, it is a teaching of true faithfulness, obedience and repentance. NT Wright says it this way, "The challenge of this passage for us today is partly this: to make sure we are responding to Jesus, allowing him to confront us at any point where we have been like the second son, and said 'Yes' to God, while in fact, going off in the other direction."

I think it's easier for us to resonate with the first son, he was rebellious at first but repentant and renewed after. The second son has no repentance, is all words and no actions, he has a hardened heart. He is like the religious leaders who were standing in the midst of God and yet rather than having love, humility, and reverence

for him, they are jealous, have contempt and try to trap him. They think they are following God but are so convoluted in their methods, religiosity and status that they have blinders on to the fact he's right in front of them.

It's hard for us to resonate with the second son, because it's so easy to fall into that pattern. We feel called by God to do something, to start something, to love others, to obey, to share grace, to spread the gospel and we say Yes! Yes Lord, I will do that, but then we don't..

We feel good about it, we want to do it, but we don't end up doing it. There just wasn't enough time, it wasn't the right moment, it was awkward, it was hard, maybe I was wrong about what I felt God prompting me to.

This is when our obedience becomes more a reflection of the words we're saying, rather than the actions or deeds we are doing, and in that case it isn't true obedience. In that case our

repentance is not really repentance because we are excusing ourselves out of following God's will, his heart, his direction. We get to the point where we don't want to be confronted, we don't want to be corrected. We are comfortable.

We're good. We're fine. His ways are harder than my ways. We like it easy. The religious leaders weren't open to being changed, corrected or renewed by Jesus' or John the Baptist's teachings. They were good with how things were.

There have been so many times in my life and continue to be times in my life where I just want to do what's comfortable. I want to do what's easy, and a lot of times that is going against God's will and direction. He wants me to talk with, minister to, love on and be there for certain people when maybe that's the last thing I want to do.

I remember a student I had in my Connect Group years back who I poured so much time, love and effort into. I had had him when he was a middle schooler and I would talk to him about his doubts, his mistakes, how he wants to be better. I saw him begin to get in trouble at school and with law enforcement. Even going to juvenile detention for short stints.

Then he'd come back and want to be close with God again, he knew the comfort, the love and the grace he felt at church and with this relationship with God. So for years I would drive out of my way to pick him up for Connect Groups, to bring him to church, make all these sacrifices because I loved and cared about him and more importantly I knew God loved and cared about him. It was uncomfortable at times, I would have to get involved with situations in my early twenties that I never thought I would have to get involved with.

He ended up getting in trouble with the law again and it was looking rough. His lawyer was preparing him that he might get locked up for awhile. There were people and gang members in the area that were out to get him and were harassing him and his family. It was scary stuff. It was uncomfortable.

But I knew God loved him, I knew that the seeds I was helping plant in his life mattered. Even if it felt like nothing stuck, there was no lasting heart change or behavior change, even if I drove countless times to go get him and bring him to church or group and it didn't seem like he was getting anything, I knew it mattered, I knew God was using it. I knew it was important for me to continue to be obedient and faithful.

Now trust me, there were many times I needed repentance and correction from the Lord because I didn't want to do it anymore. I didn't want to keep picking him up, pouring into his life,

giving advice and wisdom with all the crap he dealing with and involved in. But at the end of the day all the uncomfortableness, all the sacrifice is worth it, whether or not I see it stick. And to be honest I didn't see a lot of it stick. But I know it mattered. And I know that he did end up cleaning up his life and getting involved more with church and last I heard the seeds were growing and developing in his life. But even if they hadn't, the uncomfortability and obedience would still be worth it.

We have to make sure we're not so rooted and comfortable in how our life is going and the blessings we already have that we become turned off to following God's will. We lose that desire to be humbled and confronted with doing the uncomfortable, with loving others, with seeking out God's will. Genuine obedience is often times not comfortable. Genuine repentance is definitely not comfortable. And being open

and faithful to being humbled and confronted by God is not comfortable.

My prayer for us would be that we become open and okay with being uncomfortable. That we seek out the uncomfortable of genuine obedience, genuine repentance and genuine faithfulness that comes with confrontation and correction. If we become open and ready to step in God's will through these things, we will see him use us in ways to love and bless others in ways we never could have imagined. We will see radical heart change in those we never thought it was possible. We will see the miraculous and the amazing power of God displayed in our lives.

We will become vessels to see his love radically transform our worlds around us. That's something I'm willing to be uncomfortable to see and experience.



I hope you feel God tugging on your heart to get a little uncomfortable as he works through your life through love, faithfulness, obedience and repentance.

Let's pray...

As you go today remember to be open to the uncomfortable, to seek obedience and repentance, and through this faithfulness you will see radical heart change in your life.