

# The Parables of Jesus

## - The Two Sons

-Matthew 21:28-32

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. This parable is one of the parables that Jesus taught as He entered into Jerusalem and what we refer to as "Palm Sunday." There are a series of events that lead up to this parable.

In Matthew 20:29, we read that Jesus and His disciples had departed from Jericho to go to Jerusalem. As they did a "great multitude" was following them. This also was because at this time people were coming into Jerusalem to celebrate not only Passover but also the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This Feast of Unleavened Bread was one of the three feasts in which the men (therefore their families) were mandated, by the Jewish Law, to attend and therefore be in Jerusalem and go to Temple.

In Matthew 20:30-34, on the road to Jerusalem they came upon two blind men, both of which Jesus had compassion on and therefore He healed them both. They joined along with the crowd and followed Him to Jerusalem.

In Matthew 21:1-11, we see that they entered Jerusalem on what we refer to as "Palm Sunday." It seemed as if it was a "triumphant entrance" into Jerusalem for Jesus. Surely, His disciples thought that they were correct and that Jesus was incorrect concerning how this would all turn out. Remember, that the disciples had visions of "grandeur" and glorious victory for Jesus as the "King of the Jewish People." It looked to them as if everything was working out just according to plan - **their** plan – not God's plan.

In Matthew 21:12-16, we read that Jesus enters the Temple and clears it of all the moneychangers and those who were selling animals for the sacrifices. We need to make note that these were necessary things for the Passover. People were coming from all over. They needed to exchange their currency for the currency of Jerusalem. They would also need to purchase animals for their Passover sacrifices.

The problem was not that these things were being done. The problem was **where** they were being done - inside the Temple proper. All of these "Temple" business practices should have taken place outside of the Temple out of respect and honor for the Temple itself and all that it represented concerning the correct way to worship Yahweh, Adonai. They had brought these "business practices" into "God's House of Prayer," thereby, disrespecting and putting these things and their profits from the things of God above the true honor and respect for God and the worship of their God.

This is an important lesson for us today. Do we place a greater emphasis on the things we worship God with and bring that concept into our worship gatherings? We must realize and recognize that the most important aspect of approaching our God is to have the **correct attitude of heart** when we come before Him. That attitude of heart should be one that desires to honor, revere and respect a Holy, Sovereign, righteous God. We are not to give a greater place or emphasis to the "vehicles" and "tools" that we worship our God with than God, Himself. Hmmm.....

In Matthew 21:17, we see that Jesus left the Temple and Jerusalem and spent the night in Bethany, most likely at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. In Matthew 21:18-22, the next day, we see as He was on His way to back to Jerusalem, we read of the account of Jesus "cursing" the fig tree because it had leaves but "no fruit." We always use this as a teaching upon faith, which is not necessarily incorrect.

However, there is a deeper meaning to this action and this event. In Bible references, the fig tree is always symbolic of the nation of Israel. Therefore, in this account, it is really referring to Israel being cursed, in general, because of the hardness of their heart towards God. They did not bear fruit. They did not see nor did they honor their God by recognizing Jesus for who He was, therefore, they would be cursed.

In Matthew 21:23, we see Jesus continues on into Jerusalem and goes back into the Temple. The religious leaders immediately confront Him and ask Him the question, "... by what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?"

We Jesus answered their questioning in Matthew 21:24-27. However, Jesus answered their question with a question to them concerning John the Baptist. Jesus refers to the refusal of the Pharisees and religious leaders to hear and accept the message of John the Baptist, which was that they all - the publicans, sinners, Pharisees, Scribes, religious leaders, everyone - needed to repent for the Kingdom of God was at hand.

Jesus proceeds to give the first parable in this teaching setting.

*The Parable of the Two Sons - Matthew 21:28-32 - "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."*

Let us first review the "characters of this parable.

- A "certain man" - This man had two sons. He also owned a vineyard. This is obviously referring to God, the Father
- The "vineyard" - As discussed previously, the term "vineyard" is used in the Bible to represent God's field, Israel as well as all that are upon the earth.
- The "first son" - This "first son" refused, but later obeyed and went.
- The "second son" - This "second son" initially expressed obedience, but actually disobeyed and refused to work in the vineyard.

So what was Jesus teaching the disciples in this parable? Jesus actually gives the purpose of this parable in Matthew 20:31, 32. He asked the Pharisees themselves, which of the two "sons" actually ended up doing the will of their father. With everyone listening, they had to answer with the obvious - the first son. Out of their own mouths, Jesus used their own words to reveal their own hardness of heart. Jesus then goes on to explain in Matthew 20:32.

He likens the "first son" to tax collectors and prostitutes—the sinners and outcasts of Jewish society, according to the Pharisees. Those "outcasts" had heard and listened to John, the Baptist. They heard and chose to believe John, the Baptist and accept His message of "repentance" expressed with "fruits of repentance." Even though they initially did not follow after God and His ways in their lives, they had heard the message preached by John and chose to repent. Through their repentance they have now found "the way of righteousness."

Jesus then likens the Pharisees to the second son. They outwardly said they would do the right things, referring to keeping the ways and commandments of God. They claimed obedience. However, they did not do the will of the Father. Inwardly, they were just as much a sinner as anyone else. In their heart was found an unwillingness to change when confronted to repent and believe in this "way of righteousness," when declared to them first by John the Baptist and now through Jesus.

Note: The three actions by Jesus prior to the giving of this parable - the healing of the two blind men, the cleansing of the Temple and the cursing of the fig tree - may seem as if they are three isolated events with their own purposes that "just happened" to take place prior to the giving of this parable. However, in the context of this whole narrative in Matthew's account of this last time in Jerusalem, there is a connection with these three events and this "Parable of the Two Sons," as well as the next two parables.

Jesus was making a strong "symbolic" point. The two "blind men" cried out to Jesus, "*Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.*" In other words they were declaring their belief that He was indeed the Messiah. They were crying out for mercy. They received mercy and their "sight" was restored. They were symbolic of the "spiritual blindness" of the Jewish people, as well as their leadership. Those that believe in who Jesus is and cry out for mercy, which is a "fruit of repentance," will have their "spiritual sight" restored. Jesus was expressing in this parable that those "outcasts" will find "the way of righteousness" which ultimately is through Him

With the fig tree we see that the fact that the fig tree, which always was representative of Israel, had "leaves but no fruit," expressed that the Temple (the place of worship) was "out of order." This was symbolic of Israel's poor spiritual state of being. They had all of the outward appearances of spirituality, but lacked true substance.

As with the fig tree, Israel may have had the "leaves" and the "vessels" of true worship but they lacked the "fruit" of repentance and true obedience to God. If they would cry out to Jesus for mercy, an act or "fruit" of true repentance, they would receive their "spiritual" sight concerning God and His coming Kingdom.

According to Jesus, we read that the responsibility for the lack of true repentance and true obedience to God and His Word was placed totally upon the religious leadership of Israel. Outwardly, they were pious and appeared to be people of God. However, God knew their heart, and it is within their heart that they have failed miserably.

Jesus was teaching His disciples, as well as many in Christian leadership today, that He takes the responsibility given to those who have been placed in the position of leadership and authority within His Kingdom, very seriously. It would do us well to heed the lessons of these events and to not think that they were just for the Pharisees of that time. They are just as important for the leadership within the Body of Christ in today's world as it was in Jesus' day.

Jesus, through this parable was teaching the Jewish leadership, as well as anyone else who would be listening, that it is very, very, very important that we do not rely on anything else for our salvation. We must look only to Him. He is our salvation. Our salvation only comes through Him. However, we first must recognize our sinful ways and our sinful life. We may have previously relied on the ways and actions of our faith for our salvation. However, as Jesus so clearly reveals to us and those that will follow Him as He is less than one week from the cross, that in this parable we read that it must be a decision based on, founded in and made within one's own heart.

It is a true salvation that God seeks. Not simply the actions of that salvation. Yes, the actions will come and they should come forth. However, there must first be a decision of the heart. It is a decision that is based upon the fact that an individual truly recognizes their need for God. It is a decision that is based upon the understanding that they truly need God.

We see that repentance is a primary action that leads to a true salvation. However, it is a true, heartfelt repentance that will lead to a true, heart changing lifestyle that will lead us unto the pathway of righteous living. Jesus, never, said that John's way was incorrect. He was expressing that it was the way that will lead to salvation. Salvation only comes through Jesus.

However, salvation's first step is recognizing how sinful I am. I need a Savior. I need Jesus. I repent and choose to allow Jesus to now rule and reign in my life. I choose to allow Him to lead and guide my way. I freely choose to allow Jesus to be the Lord of my life, which ultimately leads me into a relationship back to the Father. The relationship has been restored through Jesus, not only dying on that cross, but by being raised from the dead and who is now alive and well and sitting at the right hand of the Father.

Amen and amen.