

THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #035
A Chronological Study

**"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and
uttered things hidden since the creation of the world."
Psalm 78:2**



"The Two Sons"
Mt 21:28-32¹

THE INTRODUCTION

We've talked about Jesus' use of parables a lot during this series. It's probably good to know a little about when and why Jesus started to use parables as His method to teach.

Each gospel has its own method and purpose in the writing of Jesus' life and ministry. Matthew's gospel give us the most linear timeline for the life and ministry of Jesus. If we study Matthew's gospel we'll find that up until the middle of chapter 12 Jesus has been teaching directly from His Old Testament and especially the Prophets. Then, at verse 22, Jesus heals a blind mute man. In

response the crowd begins saying, "this man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" And right away the Pharisees heard this and proclaimed, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons," and Jesus begins using metaphor, parables, to "encode" his messages so that only those effected by the Holy Spirit would hear His full and meanings. In the verses just below it's helpful if you already know that the "you" refers to Jesus' disciples who are believing, and the "they/them" refers to the Pharisees and Scribes who are not believing. Of specific interest is that most of Jesus' parables are speaking concerning the "Kingdom of Heaven."

When asked by His disciples why He taught in parables... He told them:

"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matthew 13:11-13).

We should see in this verse that those who "have" belief and the Holy Spirit - are given the "Mysteries of the Kingdom." For that's what these parables are about. Those who "don't have" belief and the Holy Spirit - will have what they currently possess in incomplete form, the earthly promise of the Kingdom of God, taken away from them.

Hopefully we've all come to some good conclusions about the use of parables as a method to supply important information to a point that Jesus is going to make. A long-term fact worth remembering, especially when starting another new one is... the parable is Jesus' form of pointed illustration. Most things included in His illustrations are not to be taken literally. For instance, If He were to refer to the actions of a cat, i.e., "and he was meowing at the gate," we should not immediately think His subject is a cat, but rather someone anxious or eager to enter a closed door.

This parable speaks of an unknown man who has two sons... why would anyone consider Jesus is speaking of one of them as a possible prostitute or thief? Well, let's take a look.

OUR BACKGROUND

Once again we will take a brief look at those things in our text that come before our parable in this chapter.

Mt 21:1-6

1 When they (Jesus and His disciples) had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

I first asked myself, "Why does Jesus speak of getting the donkey and colt in the first place?"

Throughout the bible, and especially in the New Testament Jesus spoke (and virtually all of the writers wrote) quoting from places in the Old Testament which prophetically spoke concerning the topic that He was explaining. What many have not recognized is the fact that He is leading His listeners (and the writers their readers) to look at the context of the quoted verse. That quoted verse sits in a string of sentences or paragraphs of information that is essential for the hearer of Jesus' words full understanding of what He is saying that you would miss if you didn't do that. And this is one of those places. Here, Jesus quotes Hezekiah 9 and verse 9... because He wants you to see all of Hezekiah chapter 9, especially Hezekiah 9:10. Hezekiah is speaking about the coming dissolution of the nation as the givers of the Good News to the world, and giving that responsibility to "the nations." At Jesus' time of execution... that dissolution of the nation was just 40 years away by emperor

Caesar. Israel will cease to be a nation and Jerusalem (and the temple) will be destroyed.

Here we'll insert the actual quote from Hezekiah 9:9 a brief commentary and then move on to the unquoted Hezekiah 9:10.

***09 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

Matthew uses only a portion of the quote to remind all who read Hezekiah that Jesus' coming would be about the recrimination of Israel and especially Jerusalem, the capital of the nation, at this very special of prophesied time – The arrival of their Savior and future King. We shouldn't miss the fact that Jesus is requesting both the needed foal, and its mother. What a kind heart our Lord has – even toward this young foul that it should be without its mother on this journey.

Then in the very next verse (:10) the prophecy speaks of what will happen soon – Israel will be cut off and He will move His benevolent actions to the ends of the earth as He takes on His Church (both Jews and Gentiles) as those responsible for the preaching of His Gospel and reaches out to the whole world with the Gospel of salvation.

***10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
And the horse from Jerusalem;
And the bow of war will be cut off.
And He will speak peace to the nations;
And His dominion will be from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.***

Moving on with the story... Jesus said, "go get the donkey and it's colt" and then the disciples did just as Jesus asked. Matthew then continues his story.

And then (Mt 21:9-10) The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,

***"Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!"***

Here both Matthew and Mark quote the crowds. The word hosanna comes from a Hebrew word meaning "save now" or "Save us, we pray." By saying "hosanna" as Jesus passed through the gates of Jerusalem and their referring to the Son of David, these Jews were acknowledging Jesus as their Messiah. This indicated the hope that their Messiah had finally come to set up God's kingdom then and there. This large group of followers that led and followed Jesus into Jerusalem should give us a good indication that many from Galilee and Judah were perhaps true followers of Jesus. There was also a large number of Jews who believed He was a true Prophet and had a great respect for Him and His teaching. While the biblical story is about the Jews and their rabbinical leadership having led much of the nation away from God and the true Old Testament worship and belief, it does not mean that there were not many awaiting for, and believing in, Jesus as their Messiah who were necessary for the beginnings of His church at Pentecost.

Following this event (Mt 21:12-17) comes The Cleansing of the Temple, which I'm sure made none of the religious elite happy. This event is also part of the prophetic event showing what God is going to do with the temple and the religious leadership.

Amazingly, following that cleansing, there in the temple the blind and lame came to Jesus and he was teaching them and healing them, and there were children there shouting and singing – "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

It was then that Jesus told His story of (Mt 21:18-22) "The Unfruitful Fig Tree." Jesus had woken up early in the morning and was hungry. He went to a fig tree and found no figs upon it for His breakfast. He then made the tree wither immediately. Jesus, pre-incarnate, as the Son of God, was the one who created the universe. He came to earth as a man and that Fig tree would not

provide Him with breakfast. Seen correctly, this event that really happened was also meant to speak of the Jewish religious leadership - they refused to recognize Him as who He really was, and their nation would wither and be cut off because of it.

Almost immediately, the chief priests and elders spoke to Jesus and challenged His authority for speaking like that to them.

(Mt 21:24-27) Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." 27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

As a separate event in **Luke's gospel (13:6-9)** was Jesus using this fig tree parable as the precious moment to demonstrate His continuing willingness to give Israel more time to repent - even after His death - and then saying, "and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down. He was speaking figuratively about the eventuality of the destruction of both Israel and Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. - **Jesus, just before His crucifixion, giving Israel the next 40 years to consider Him.**

He then told them our next parable.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

Matthew 21:28-32 [NASB]

So, once again we'll take this parable nice and slow so it can be fully absorbed.

Jesus is still standing with both groups of His disciples and the religious leadership to whom He declined to answer their question about His authority.

Quick recap of the recap – in case you missed it – like all those around Him did.

In This Chapter alone:

1. Messiah is **here in Jerusalem**, **Mt. 21:1-6**
2. Prophecy tells **why** He is here, **Mt 21:7-8; Hez 9:9-10**, He is coming to His people, and bringing the closing days of Israel.
3. The **Crowd** is delighted, **Mt 21:9-11**, their Messiah has come.
4. Cleansing the Temple – a **foretaste** of the prophecy to be fulfilled in (40 years), **Mt 21:12-17**.
5. The Fig tree = **Israel**, **Mt 21:18-22**, they were found not wanting Jesus as their savior and they became fruitless.
6. The Fig tree parable - The **Compassionate** Messiah – on the road to the Cross, **Lk 13:6-9**.

They are all just standing there relatively confused as to what to do or say next.

So, He said,

28a "But what do you think?"

A great statement to get all of their attention. They probably muttered to each other – “I didn’t hear him ask us a question...” His question was about the chief priests and the elder's question - “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

And this was Jesus' answer:

28b A man had two sons,

Jesus sets up a situation where He is going to point out a comparison situation – son #1 versus son #2.

and he (the man) **came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'** ²⁹ **And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he** (son #1) **regretted it and went."**

This father gives this first son a simple command, "go and work." I'm sure most of us have been in this situation. A parent asks us to do something and we go off refusing to do what we've been asked to do.... But after considering the choice we made... go and do what dad said. Simple and straightforward. So what do we see. A simple straightforward refusal to do what is asked, followed by a change of mind and following the **authority** of the request of his father.

30 The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he (son #2) **answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go.**

Once again, this father gives this second son a simple command, "go and work." And again, I'm sure most of us have been in this situation once or twice. This time the second son, noticeably, does not take any time to consider his father's authority and just doesn't do what he is asked to do.

31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They (Jesus disciples, followers, and religious leaders) ***said, "The first."**

I love Jesus' choice of words here, for it tells right-out-straight the meaning of His parable to them: **"Which of the two DID THE WILL OF HIS FATHER?"**

We have the Father, who is God, and we have the two contrasting categories: Child of the Father #1 who are those who have lived some length of unbelieving lives but will respond to Jesus - Do it... No, Yes, and Child #2 of the Father who is Israel who makes believe they serve God, but in fact do not - Do it... Yes, No.

We all know (should know) that making good on your promises is an important spiritual, and moral, truth. In reality doing is more important than saying you will do. But Jesus' words are focused upon the religious leadership right there in front of Him, and their lives are filled with deceit and manmade laws that allow them specific immoral actions and teachings which God's (their Father's) Law forbids. They have become those who are responsible for keeping God's Word and they have chosen to pervert it and teach self-benefiting lies. They said "Yes," and did "No!"

A little later in this chapter in Matthew Jesus will tell them, "***The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people*** (the Church), ***producing the fruit of it***" (Mt 21:43).

Let us look again to Jesus' metaphor.

Our first group, the "No, Yes" category here, in their lifetimes, have chosen to be **disobedient** to the moral laws of God, and upon meeting John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Savior, and now Jesus and listening to their messages of REPENTANCE and SALVATION - then "having **regretted** their former choice of living," changed their lives, and now agree with their heavenly Father's request and have become obedient as "an **obedient son**."

Our second group, the "Yes, No" category is now left to last. These are those who are self satisfied with their godless lives and hear God's message of the Gospel of Salvation and dance and wave their arms, exclaiming how wonderful God's salvation is... **but it's all a show**, and their real answer is "**No I Will Not go and do as you command.**"

Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes (the "No - Yes" group) ***will get into the kingdom of God before you.*** ³² ***For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you*** (the religious leadership, the "Yes - No" group) ***did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him;***

and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him."

And this is the final really telling sentence, God, the Savior is telling you who have done this and did not even **feel remorse** afterward – specifically so as to **believe Him!**

This little parable was spoken to those religious leaders who approached Him trying to catch Him violating God's Law and/or their rabbinical "oral law." They were not there to enter into joyful celebration for the arrival of their saving Messiah – they were there trying to condemn Him and in a week, they will put Him to death on the Cross.

The message to us today is still the same as it was to these religious leaders. This is their last week, and it will be their last opportunity after saying "No" to reconsider their choice.

If you are one who had a "religious experience" some time ago and you entered into a false seeming relationship with Christ and/or His Church... please re-consider that choice, and take Jesus as your Savior and believe in Him – for this may be your last week to consider Him as Your Savior.

This is a good time to provide a reminder about taking Christ as your Savior and serving almighty God with your life.

[Psalm 51:16-17]

"For You (God) do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The (real) sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

According to Scripture, the sole requirement for salvation is that men and women exercise faith in the provision that God has revealed.

Faith is not to be considered a meritorious work on the person's part, for Scripture affirms everywhere that faith, as all of salvation, is God's gift to mankind.

[Ephesians 2:8]

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

[Romans 6:23]

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There is no question that faith is clearly taught as the sole requirement for salvation in the Old and New Testament of the Bible.

The ultimate object of faith in any and every age is God Himself. The ultimate issue at any time in history is whether a man or woman, boy or girl, will take God at His word and exercise faith in the provision for salvation which God reveals.

Clearly, whatever religious rites, good works, and so on, a person might begin or resume, and whatever promises they might reaffirm, the repentant sinner was ultimately turning or returning to God. In all times, they are the ultimate object of faith. Even today when we ask individuals to believe in Jesus Christ as their personal savior, we are asking for an ultimate commitment to God. He is the one who has revealed that salvation is available through faith in Christ. Moreover, a rejection of Christ constitutes a refusal to believe God's word about Christ; it is a rejection of God Himself.

Years ago I heard the gospel message preached by Dr. George Slavin. His simple approach to the question, "How do I get saved?" was simply, "Just like the wedding ceremony, I George do take you Jesus to be my savior, to be my God and my Lord - I give my life to you." Yes, it's that simple. God is looking for men, women, girls and boys, who of their own will and volition choose to love God and to do so through His Son, Jesus - the Anointed One of God (Messiah / Christ).

What about obedience following belief? The specific expression of faith confronts the believer as they contemplate how they are to live out the salvation they have already been given. It is his/her way of responding to God in obedience as evidence that they have already

believed. So therefore works are a matter of response to God for the wonderful gift of salvation based upon faith.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

- 1. Why does Jesus use parables to teach His lessons to those around Him?**
- 2. How does Jesus use Bible verses from the Old Testament Prophets?**
- 3. What is the parable of the "Two Sons" really about?**
- 4. What would be a good secondary message from this short parable?**

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

- 1. Why does Jesus use parables to teach His lessons to those around Him?**

Jesus uses the parable as a way to use an illustration to lead his hearers (and readers) to have to think about **what the illustration means**. Because it is an illustration, different interpretations can be made by those intended to hear the parable. His Disciples, who know Him and are listening for lessons to be learned by them may well come to different conclusions than the Pharisees, for instance, who are listening to Him in order to find fault with His teaching.

Often, Jesus uses these very differences to teach quite different lessons to each of the listening groups. We have often pointed out that there are at least three different audiences for each of Jesus' parables: The Disciples; the common man/woman; and the Pharisees; who are following along as He travels – 3 different

interpretations: 1. I need to believe; 2. isn't that a nice story; 3. we need to kill this man.

2. How does Jesus use Bible verses from the Old Testament Prophets?

Jesus most often will include a verse or two in order to make the listener remember, and look up, a central meaningful verse that's part of a much larger segment of Scripture with a much larger meaning and purpose. In this lesson, Jesus quotes Hezekiah 9:9, but His broader intention is for the listener to see the following paragraph as well. "Your King is coming and He'll be mounted on a colt!" but then the following verse tells of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Israel as a nation.

3. What is the parable of the "Two Sons" really about?

Jesus equates the first son to those who hear the Holy Spirit's offer of God's grace after they have experienced enough life to see the wondrous offer for what it really is – the Grace of God offering (the office of) sonship to all those who just ask and agree to it through His Son who makes the offer possible. Thus His examples are the prostitute and the tax gatherer who come to Christ in belief.

Then Jesus equates the second son to those who hear that same call and make believe they have made the believing choice – but who, in reality, have never believed, and have refused God's offer.

Jesus uses these two son relationships to point out the damning nature of the reality of who the religious leadership really are – phonies who make believe their holiness, but are in fact immoral and not holy in any sense. They see God's program of Salvation through this Savior as something that must be destroyed.

4. What would be a good secondary message from this short parable?

The secondary message would be about decisions that you make while under God's authority. Are you one who ultimately both regards and follows the commands that Scripture makes upon you?

Following the Lord God's desires for you will ultimately be to your complete and eternal advantage.

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Jeremiah 18:15

"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"

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¹ **All Scriptures from the New American Standard Bible (1995)**