

Matthew 21:28-32: 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.'²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went.³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.³¹ 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.³² 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 afterward change your minds and believe him."

Intro: Last time we were in Matthew, we saw the religious leaders question Jesus' authority, & He responded by asking them a question they couldn't answer, revealing the true state of their sinful hearts & Jesus' supreme knowledge & authority. The main point was: you don't question Jesus' authority: He holds highest seniority, He alone is the majority, in everything He is superiority, & submission to Him is always your first priority.

This week, Jesus tells a parable that contrasts the religious leaders' rejection of John's (& therefore His) authority with the submission to their authority by some very non-religious, scandalous people. & we see that Jesus hates hypocrisy, & He delights in repentance (change of mind), faith, & obedience to all the will of God. Talk is cheap! "Performance is more important than promise." Trust is more important than talk.

You should submit to Jesus' authority, change your mind, & trust & obey Him in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

1. The Parable Of The Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-31: 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.'²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went.³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first."

a. A father who commands: He has two sons and he commands them to go work in the vineyard.

- **Exodus 20:12:** Honor your father & your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

- **Ephesians 6:1-3:** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

- **Colossians 3:20:** Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. (Father's command=good)

b. A son who says "No" to obedience, but then obeys: V. 29: And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went.

Saying no to a lawful order your father gives you is bad! That's disobedience! But in the end, he obeys his father.

Proverbs 21:3: To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

c. A 2nd son who says "Yes" to obedience, but then disobeys: V. 30: And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.

d. Jesus' question to the Jewish religious leaders (the chief priests & the elders, v. 23): V. 31: Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." (This parable is about them! They say "Yes!" but don't do!)

Doing the will of the father is what matters most! **Matthew 7:21-24:** Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man

who built his house on the rock.

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2. Jesus' Interpretation Of The Parable Of The Two Sons

Matthew 21:31-32: Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. [instead of you]³² 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 afterward change your minds and believe him."

a. Sinners are repenting for their sins & believing in the One (Jesus!) John prepared the way for!:

- **Matthew 9:9-13:** As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"¹² But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

- **Luke 7:36-50:** One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table.³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?"⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

b. When the Jewish religious leaders rejected John, they rejected Jesus, & they refused to repent & believe:

Matthew 21:23-27: & when he entered the temple, the chief priests & the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, & said, "By what authority are you doing these things, & who gave you this authority?"²⁴ Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, & if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.²⁵ The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" & they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'"²⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet."²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." & he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Craig Blomberg: 1) Like the father sending his sons to work, God commands all people to carry out His will.
2) Like the son who ultimately disobeyed, some promise but do not perform rightly and so are rejected by God.
3) Like the son who ultimately obeyed, some rebel but later submit and so are accepted.

c. Anyone who repents & believes in Jesus can & will be saved: Prostitutes & tax collectors can be saved!

Pedophiles; rapists; & racist KKK members can be saved! Murderers can be saved! The thief on the cross – saved!

1 Corinthians 6:9-11: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. **GOSPEL!**

Ezekiel 33:11: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way & live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Hymn: This vilest of sinners who truly believes; that moment from Jesus a pardon receives!

d. Beware of saying “Yes” to God & making an outward show of religion, but then failing to obey God & have true, living, vital religion in your heart: The religious leaders were hypocrites – outward show!

David Platt: It’s quite astonishing to consider who is identified in this parable as being obedient to the father. Women who were slaves to sex (prostitutes) had experienced a radical transformation by submitting to God through John’s ministry. They were previously trying to find thirst-quenching satisfaction in people, but now they found it in the living water that only comes from the King’s cup. Men like Matthew, the author of this Gospel, were changed from greedy tax-collectors to lavish givers. Yet the religious leaders, who had seen great changes in people through God’s grace, still refused to believe. Sure, with their lips they said they loved God, but their hearts were far from Him. They ultimately failed to follow His will. There were like the second son who said “yes,” but their lives said “no.” This is a story of dead faith without works, a topic James’ epistle speaks to. To put it another way, this is a story of confession without repentance and submission. While some people genuinely turned from their sin and trusted in God, the chief priests and elders merely gave verbal affirmation to Him; there was no real repentance or submission.

e. If you’ve started out saying no to God, it’s still not too late to change your mind: If you’ve started out on the wrong path – the path of evil & rebellion against God, there’s still time to repent! There’s still time to turn to God & trust in God & start obeying Him & following Him on the righteous path! There’s still time to humble yourself:

- **(Manasseh) 2 Chronicles 33:9-13:** Manasseh led Judah & the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel. The LORD spoke to Manasseh & to his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks & bound him with chains of bronze & brought him to Babylon. And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God & humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, & God was moved by his entreaty & heard his plea & brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

- **(Ahab) 1 Kings 21:21-29:** I will utterly burn you up, & will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, & like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, & because you have made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel the LORD also said, “The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.” Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, & anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.” (There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel.) And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes & put sackcloth on his flesh & fasted & lay in sackcloth & went about dejectedly. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house.”

f. The first & most important part of what Jesus is calling for in this parable is belief in the One to Whom John pointed: V. 32: For John came to you in the way of righteousness, & you did not believe him, but the tax collectors & the prostitutes believed him. & even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds & believe him. (**John 1:29:** Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!)

g. Hope in God's Mercy-Heart: God delights to pursue you with mercy! His mercy-fountain never runs dry!

- **Lam. 3:19–24:** The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."
- **Psalm 147:11:** The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.
- **Psalm 23:6:** Surely goodness & mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life
- **Romans 5:20:** where sin increased, grace abounded all the more

- **David Mathis:** Fittingly, the most prominent request made of Jesus in the Gospels is, "Have mercy on me!"

- **John Piper:** Not only does God promise not to turn away from doing good to us, he says, "I will rejoice in doing them good" (Jeremiah 32:41). "The LORD will again take delight in prospering you" (Deuteronomy 30:9). He does not bless us begrudgingly. There is a kind of eagerness about the beneficence of God. He does not wait for us to come to him. He seeks us out, because it is his pleasure to do us good. "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is whole toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). God is not waiting for us, he is pursuing us. That, in fact, is the literal translation of Psalm 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life." I have never forgotten how a great teacher once explained it to me. He said God is like a highway patrolman pursuing you down the interstate with lights flashing and siren blaring to get you to stop – not to give you a ticket, but to give you a message so good it couldn't wait till you get home. God loves to show mercy. Let me say it again. God loves to show mercy. He is not hesitant or indecisive or tentative in his desires to do good to his people. His anger must be released by a stiff safety lock, but his mercy has a hair trigger. That's what he meant when he came down on Mount Sinai and said to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Exodus 34:6). The point is the contrast between the sluggishness of his anger and the effusiveness of his love.

Hymn: Thy mercy is Jesus exempts me from hell; Its glories I'll sing, and its wonders I'll tell
'Twas Jesus my all, as He hung on the tree; Who opened the channel of mercy for me!

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How can we sinners receive mercy & God remain a just, holy God? Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father Who said "Yes!" to all of His Father's will, & He perfectly obeyed all of His Father's will. Yet, because of His great love for You & for the glory of God, He submitted Himself to be treated like the disobedient son. On that cross, He did not enter the kingdom of God but was cast out as the unclean, disobedient son. He suffered the hell & wrath of God that we deserve. He died. But then He rose & ascended to rule, reign, & intercede for us forever!

Christ Jesus Is The Righteous Way
He Is The Son Who "Yes!" Would Say
Then All His Father's Will Obey
But We've All Sinned And Gone Astray
Like Whores And Cheats Who Do Betray
We've Chosen Our Own Selfish Way
But Christ Would Die Our Debt To Pay
On Him Hell's Wrath Would Fully Lay

But Then He Rose All Death To Slay
By Faith Alone We're Just Today
We Change Our Minds To Walk His Way
We Too Say "Yes!" And Do And Pray
For Jesus Takes Our Sins Away
God's Promises In Him Are Yea
Who Put God's Love On Full Display
So We Like Him Trust And Obey!