

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Two Sons

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[VIDEO: R.H. Thomson Expressway]

You've probably heard the old expression: The road to Hell is paved with good intentions. Ever have someone agree to make something or build something for you, but they just never get around to finishing the job? They have every intention ... but So much for good intentions! In the parable of The Two Sons, Jesus makes it really clear; it's not how we start the race that matters, it's how we finish.

"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.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 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." - *Matthew 21:28-32 NIV*



This short parable contains two basic but crucial themes in regards to the Kingdom of God:

1. Good intentions don't get us in
2. Bad reputations won't keep us out

The first son represents the worst of reputations among the Jews: tax collectors and prostitutes. Using these two titles was a common way of expressing the "full spectrum" of sin. Tax collector's lived in luxury, prostitutes lived in filth; so together they encompass the high-life to the low-life of sin.

He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard." "I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went (21:28b-29)

The Father represents God; the vineyard represents His Kingdom. Notice that he gives a *command*, not a *suggestion*: "go and work today in the vineyard". This is the same command we receive.

So, the first son rebels, but then does two things which represent the two halves of true repentance. First: "He changed his mind"; As he heads to the "pool hall", he has the realization that his Father loves him, the conviction that he deserves his obedience, and the remorse for how he has disobeyed and dishonored him.



And then: "And [he] went". He responded by surrendering to his father's will. Repentance requires attitude *and* action. Whenever we become aware that we've drifted away or veered off course (of His will), we must *change our mind* and *re-surrender*.

It's not about gritting our teeth and recommitting ourselves to the rules and rituals of our religion. It's the renewed realization of how much He loves me. It's the deep conviction that He *so* deserves my obedience. It's the heart-felt remorse for how I have dishonored Him. And, ultimately it's the re-surrendering of my will to His.



Repentance is an ongoing process of returning.

Is there a command of obedience that you know the Lord has given you, but you continue to say, "No" to Him? What will it take to change your mind?

And then there was son number two:

He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go (21:30)

Do you think he was sincere or insincere in his reply? We're not told. All we know is that: His words spoke commitment to his father; but his actions spoke commitment to himself. Which commitment do I communicate to my friends and family?



Maybe this son was sincere. Good intentions don't guarantee good results. Sometimes we just don't get around to putting our good intentions into practice. We hear the Word, we have the desire, we see the need, but then life takes over and action is shelved until "tomorrow". When was the son commanded to act?

Go and work today in the vineyard (21:28b)



The time to put faith into action is always *now*. Sunday's conviction *must* be Monday's action. If it's not, it means I'm low on gratefulness; which means I've "drifted" or "veered" and need a renewed realization of how much I am loved! Gratitude fuels my desire to honor, please, and obey.

But what if he was insincere? Have you ever said what someone wanted to hear, just to get 'em off the phone, or off of your back?! "I'll call you back; we'll get together; I'll check into it."



Have you ever found yourself in church, singing the songs, mouthing the words, and knowing you're not about to change or do what the Lord has revealed to you? The issue is *whole-hearted* commitment. Does He have access to every area? Is my repentance full and complete or partial and limited?

- Jesus isn't Lord unless He's Lord of all.

I haven't really received Him if I'm not willing to follow Him; and that means wherever He chooses to lead.



Q: So, which son are we supposed to imitate?

A: Neither! One *refuses* to go; one *fails* to go.

We should be like the *third* son (who didn't make the parable): He agreed to go ... and then went!

We should talk like the second son who said, "I will!" and act like the first, who went.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered (21:31)



But, the father didn't *want* his son to refuse to go in the first place. In fact, in a Middle Eastern context this would be like telling your dad to drop dead! Jesus point here is simply that:

- God's will is fulfilled in our doing, not talking.

But Jesus doesn't use either son as a *good* example. He uses the contrast between the sons to make a striking *accusation* against the Chief Priests and the Pharisees in the crowd.

Q: How do we know?

A: Fourteen verses (and one more parable later) Matthew writes:

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. - *Matthew 21:45*

Like the son who said, "I will!" but did not go ... they proudly professed their devotion to God, and faithfulness to His Word, and yet, rejected His Son, as Messiah. But notice how carefully Jesus words His accusation. Even in this scathing reproach, He doesn't fail to leave an open door.

I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you (21:31b)

He doesn't say: "Instead of you!"

At this point, the religious community is ignoring what common sinners are embracing. But Jesus knows that many of them will repent and receive Him as Savior on the Day of Pentecost:

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." ... With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them ... and about three thousand were added to their number that day. - *Acts 2:23, 40a, 41b*

Jesus told this parable about three days before His death. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey; the large crowd spread their coats on the road (*Mark 11:8*), and praised Him as their King (*Luke 19:38*) and their Savior (*Mark 11:9*).

All the people, even the tax collectors ... had been baptized by John [the Baptist]. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John. - *Luke 7:29-30 NIV condensed*

John was preparing his people to receive the Messiah by calling them to repent of their sins, and to be baptized. The religious leaders wouldn't submit to his baptism because he *demand*ed they repent; and they *insisted* they were *already* pure.

- Ethnically, because they were Sons of Abraham (Jews).
- Legally, because of their strict religious obedience.

They even referred to themselves as "sons of the kingdom"; and this is why Jesus tells the parable of the two "sons".

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 (*21:31b-32*)

By refusing to repent, they missed God's provision of grace and mercy, as proclaimed by John and provided by Jesus.

- And when we refuse to repent, we miss out on the same.

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. We should talk like the second son and act like the first.
2. Good intentions won't get us into the Kingdom.
3. A bad reputation won't keep us out.
4. Sunday's conviction must be Tuesday's action.