

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

Matthew 21:28-32

Key Verse: 21:31b

"Jesus said to them, `I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the [kingdom of God](#) ahead of you.'"

In the last passage we learned from Jesus the power of faith. If we have faith in Jesus, we can grab a mountain and throw it into the sea. As God promised Abraham, we can be great and be a source of blessing if we have faith in Jesus. But if we have no faith, we must live in this world with only our physical strength, and life is suffering itself. It is not easy, however, to live by faith because after the Industrial Revolution the people of the world began to live absolutely by human reason and claimed unlimited human freedom and personal rights. It sounds good. But when they do so, they abandon God and become godless. As a result, immorality and violence rule humankind. Jesus' teaching about mountain-moving faith is indeed inspiring to us. Today, Jesus laments over the unrepentant Jewish religious leaders.

First, those who said "no" but finally obeyed (28-31a). Look at verses 28-29. "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." These verses tell us that one son, who said "no" to his father's instruction, finally repented and obeyed his father's instruction. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not follow his father's instruction (30). Jesus asked [the Jewish](#) religious leaders, "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. From this point, Jesus wanted to talk about the unrepentant Jewish religious leaders and sinners who had been helpless in their sin but had repented in Jesus and became the children of God. Let's think about the one who said "no" and then changed his mind and obeyed his father's instruction. If we are going to talk about ordinary modern man, this lecture would be impossible to construct. On the other hand, if we think about Bible stories, we find many of those who at first said "no" to God's command but finally repented and fulfilled the mission through much suffering. Let's think about some exemplary persons in [the Bible](#) who said "no" but finally obeyed God's command.

Moses. God had a clear purpose to make his chosen people Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. For this, God sent them as slaves to the Egyptian Empire. God trained them under godless peoples' cruelty and no mercy so that they might come to know God's mercy that he wants to save the whole world through his chosen people Israel. When God saw his people, they had been suffering too long, and God's heart was so painful to hear their groaning and crying out for help because of their slavery. Finally their groaning and crying out went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. God visited Moses. He was born a Hebrew. Once he was a prince of the Egyptian Empire. But he sided with his own people when he saw a Hebrew being beaten up by an Egyptian. He delivered a deathly punch to the Egyptian and ran away to Midian. He became a criminal

refugee and lived in Jethro's house for forty years. Now he was eighty years old. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire. God called to him from within a bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." Then God said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey the home of the Canaanites...So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Ex 3:7-10). Moses' life as a political criminal had lasted forty years. In his mind Moses thought he had nothing to do with the world. He looked like a man of sorrow and despair. What was Moses' answer to God? Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex 3:11) God tried to persuade him, but he made many excuses. He had no confidence that he could persuade King Pharaoh of Egypt. He had no confidence that his people would follow him. Moses lived among seven women -- his wife and six sisters-in-law. The sisters talked too much. So he did not speak and became a man of slow speech. He said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Ex 4:10). God said to him, "I will be with you." Finally Moses repented and went to Pharaoh to deliver his 600,000 people. When he thought about himself, he was too weak to carry out God's mission. But when he accepted God's promise that God would be with him, he could challenge King Pharaoh of Egypt and he won over him. In this way the Exodus was possible.

Isaiah. As we know, Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets. As long as King Uzziah was on the throne, his national situation was safe. But when King Uzziah died, Isaiah felt that the bell was tolling not only for King Uzziah but also for the nation of Israel. He was in deep despair. By chance, when he went into the temple of God, he saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and exalted. And his angels were there, covering their feet, singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:3). When King Uzziah died, Isaiah despaired, and a pessimistic idea ruled and overruled his heart. So he wanted to live as an ordinary person as long as he lived. Then he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And he said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa 6:8) Then God said to him, "The people you have to shepherd are all rebellious. They are not willing to understand. Their hearts are calloused. Their eyes are closed." Then Isaiah said, "For how long, O Lord?" The Lord answered, "The holy seed will be the stump in the land" (Isa 6:11-13). It is indeed amazing. Isaiah really wanted to live as an ordinary man. But when God called him to go to his rebellious people and proclaim God, he changed his irresponsible mind and went to his people. Since then, he suffered more than enough in the course of living with God's mission.

Jonah. Jonah was a patriotic prophet. He wanted to evangelize his own people, Israel, but not the Gentiles. Once, God ordered him to go to Nineveh. But he went the other way. Then a whale swallowed him up. After three days it vomited him out onto the seashore of Nineveh. Jonah

proclaimed God's message. Then the people of Nineveh repented and cried covering their heads with ashes (Jnh 3:3-5). Jonah was very unhappy about that, thinking, "Why should these people be saved?" Whether he wanted to or not, God helped him to obey his mission.

Here we learn that God made us to do something good. God also made us to carry out his mission for the purpose of fulfilling his world salvation plan. We are all made by God with the dust of the ground and by God putting his life in us. As long as we live, we must listen to God. As the first son listened to his father, we also must listen to our God, God Almighty.

Second, Jesus laments over the unrepentant Jewish leaders (31). Look at verse 31. "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." This is Jesus' lamentation over his chosen people. God brought them out of Egypt and told them his specific plan for them. Exodus 19:5-6a says, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." When God brought them out of Egypt, he wanted to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Simply speaking, God wanted to make them a shepherd nation for the whole world. But they only enjoyed flowing honey and milk; they abandoned God and followed the culture of the Canaanites. So God had to drag them to the Babylonian Empire for the purpose of training them again. After that, God again wanted to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God hoped that they would be Bible teachers and shepherds for all the Gentiles, until the Gentiles came to know God. But they abandoned God's purpose for them. Jesus was extremely sorry. When he saw them, they had become like an old wineskin. They were useless to God. They were not a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, but they had become like stock market runners, standing all day long on the floor of the stock exchange doing their best to make a little more money. God's purpose for them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation had been clear to them for a long time. But they did not change their minds. They were all the more earthbound and attached to the things of the world. So Jesus was very sorry that the leaders of his chosen people had become so corrupted and violent toward his people. Furthermore, they did not proclaim God's word to all nations.

Third, the repentance of sinners (31). Look at verse 31b. "Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.'" As we studied, when John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the Lord, so many people came to him. Then John warned them, "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance...The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Then the crowds exclaimed, "What shall we do then?" John answered, "The man who has two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." The tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "What should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Even some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" John replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse

people falsely be content with your pay" (Lk 3:8-14). The crowds beat their chests and cried loudly, repenting their sins. Then John baptized them with the water of the Jordan River. It was indeed a beautiful scene.

When we study the gospels, we are greatly frustrated knowing that the chosen people, the Jewish religious leaders, wanted more and more to kill Jesus. But so many sinners repented at the proclamation of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God. So Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you."

Among the sinners, Matthew was an outstanding sinner. His original name was "Levi, the tax collector." In that hard situation under the Roman yoke, he studied, passed the CPA exam and became a tax collector. At that time a tax collector was known as a quisling and a renegade to his suffering people. But it did not matter to Matthew whatever they said to him. He wanted to make money. For this, he cheated his conscience and hardened his heart and began to extort money from his suffering people. Once he was eating a peanut butter sandwich in a tax collector's booth. Jesus knew his loneliness. Jesus knew that people treated Levi like a leper. Jesus knew that Levi the tax collector was self-seeking and rejected the truth and followed evil, and that he was tortured by God's wrath and anger. His soul was troubled and his distress was greater than the amount of his money. Jesus knew that he was a very bright and promising young man. But he was going astray without a shepherd. So he knocked at the door of the tax collector's booth and said to him, "Follow me" (Mt 9:9). Jesus believed that Levi would follow him because he had experienced enough mental torture and unbearable loneliness. When Jesus said to him, "Follow me," he immediately followed. "Follow me" meant to give up his job and be one of Jesus' disciples. In the gospel accounts Matthew didn't say much. But he grew until he could write the Sermon on the Mount: "You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13,14). He was a despicable tax collector. But he was changed and became one of Jesus' disciples. He became a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. As we know, there was a prostitute named Mary Magdalene (Mt 28:1). We don't know whether she became a prostitute in her own will or she was sold by an evil pimp. Anyway, she became the most pitiful person in the world. To a woman, purity and virginity is the same as her life. But Mary became a prostitute. Once she heard that Jesus came to her town for dinner in a rich Pharisee's house. She took the perfume earned by selling her body and poured it on Jesus' head and feet. Thus she made Jesus awkward before the Pharisees, and she freely touched Jesus' feet. The Pharisees were indignant and despised Jesus. But Jesus was happy to see that she did so as the evidence of her repentance (Lk 7:47). We read about the women who followed Jesus in Luke 8:2-3. It says, "...and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means." These verses describe that Jesus and his disciples were largely supported by converted woman sinners. And Mary Magdalene was one of them.

Fourth, changed people and unchanged people (32). Look at verse 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 verse tells us that the chosen people heard the voice of John the Baptist. They also heard the way of righteousness. But they did not believe John. They were unbelieving people. Their outward appearances and positions looked decent and pious. But their inner men were totally corrupted and useless. On the other hand, those who had lived without Jesus sinned much and became useless. But when they came to Jesus, their sins were forgiven and they became new women and men, and they could have a living hope, eternal life and the kingdom of God in their souls. Those who changed rejoiced in their lives, whatever situation they were in.

There are people who, like Abraham, call on the name of God while living in this money-oriented world. However, most people say they are Christians, but live in despair because they do not have hope or eternal life or the kingdom of God in their souls. We must know that many outwardly good-looking white American girls who seem to be untouchable, are terrible sinners and are crying out for help. So we must have hope of planting the word of God in them so that they may live by the grace of God.

Today we studied about the professional religious leaders and the terrible sinners living in this world. The professional religious leaders did not repent and they did not enter the kingdom of God. But the notorious sinners repented and entered first into the kingdom of God.