

## PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS – Matthew 21:28-32

### “Talk Only, No Action!”

Very often our lives or actions do not back up our words or talk. Talk is cheap but actions are costly. If this dictum is true of the material world where businesses live or die by this code, how much more the spiritual realm where eternity is at stake. Paying lip service as a way of life is the norm in many circles of relationships. Such behaviour is hypocritical but it is called socialising or by some other euphemistic colloquialism.

In the Christian context it is a matter of eternal life or eternal death. It is that serious. This parable of the two sons was spoken by the LORD Jesus Christ immediately after His encounter with the chief priests<sup>1</sup> and the elders of the people. They challenged Christ's authority to cleanse the Temple. Christ did not give them an answer. Instead, He told them that if they could give him an answer to whether the baptism of John was of men or of heaven, then He would answer their question. The enemies of Christ said that they could not tell. If they were to say that the baptism of John was from heaven, then why would they not believe him? And if they were to say that it was of men, then the people might hurt them, because the people believed that John was a prophet, hence his baptism was of heaven.

Jesus said that He would not tell them by what authority He cleansed the Temple since they could not answer Him concerning John's baptism. Then Jesus declared unto them, His enemies, this parable. Although the word “parable” was not used and it did not begin with the phrase, “the kingdom of heaven is like”, this is a parable because Christ said in verse 33 to “hear ye another parable.”

**Elements of the Parable** – A certain man had two sons. He came to the first son who was asked to go to work today in the vineyard. The first son answered that he would not but afterward repented and went. The man asked the second son to do the same; the second son said that he would go but did not. Who did the will of the father?

**Analyzing the Parable** – The parable deliberately states that the man had only two sons and not three. The reason is that Jesus was comparing only two groups of people and not three. The parable was not implying that the best son would of course be the one who would say yes to the father and then actually went to work in the vineyard. If that had been Christ's intention, He would have given a parable of a man with three sons. The first son said that he would not but he repented and obeyed the father and went to work in the vineyard. The work in the vineyard was not normally done by sons but by labourers. It was demeaning for

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<sup>1</sup>“The "chief priests" were not the high priest, and his "sagan", or deputy, but the principal of the priesthood, who were chosen from the rest of their brethren, to sit in the sanhedrim;” [John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, Swordsearcher 5.5.]

the son to work in the vineyard because it was hard labour. However, the first son did it anyway.

But the second son paid the father lip service. He said he would but he did not. It sounded good that he was an obedient son. The second son had all the appearance of a son who honoured his father. The people who heard him would probably say that he was a good son. But the fact of the matter is that he did not do it. He only sounded like an obedient son.

Then Jesus asked the elders of the people and the chief priests in **Matthew 21:31**, *“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.”* The lay leaders and chief priests had all the privileges available to them to become believers in Christ but all they did was to display an appearance of godliness. The facade of piety was present but there was no genuine life changing experience for them. They paid God lip service by their external form of holy living, dressed in garments of religiosity.

But the publicans (tax collectors) and harlots were represented by the first son who said no but repented and went to work. The publicans and harlots were the dregs and scum of Jewish society at that time. They might have, by their life of sin and debauchery rejected God but they repented of their sins and obeyed in the end. They would go into the kingdom of God before (in front of) the chief priests and elders. The indictment against the chief priests and elders was very stark and pointed. Jesus concluded by saying to them in **Matthew 21:32**, *“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.”*

**Applying the Parable** – An external demeanor of holiness or godliness means nothing to God if it is not backed up by obedience to God’s Word. God is not impressed by professing Christians who pay Him lip service only. They only talk but do not obey His Word. There are those who realize their sinful state and may initially reject God and the gospel but later would accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour by obeying His Word. Their initial refusal and rejection of God are forgiven by God even as they receive and accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour. It is not a question of who came to know the LORD first but whether one has really accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour. All who profess to be Christians, but have no interest in studying and obeying the Word of God, must check their salvation. It is not what we say that makes us Christians but whether we obey the perfect Word of God. Holding leadership positions such as pastors, elders, founders of churches, deacons, and Christian deeds like giving of tithes and offerings, and taking the Lord’s Supper will not make us Christians. It is the contrite sinner, who sincerely repents of his sins according to Holy Scriptures and does the heavenly Father’s will, who is truly born again.