

Sunday Sermon October 15, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 21:28-32

Sermon Theme: What do you think?

1. Who deserves to be forgiven? 2. Who does Jesus forgive?

²⁸ *“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.’*

²⁹ *“ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.*

³⁰ *“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.*

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.”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.

Have you ever gotten that look of disappointment from someone because you told them you were going to do something and you didn't? Maybe you received the look because you said you couldn't do something when someone asked you for help.

I know all about the look of disapproval, I saw it quite often when I was younger. My dad was very good when it came to voicing his disappointment without saying a word. There were many times that I would either forget to do what I was asked to do, or I would think I had things that were more important than helping my dad and I would just say no. I wasn't trying to make my father angry, there were just things that, at the time, were higher on my priority list.

In our lesson this morning, Jesus uses the same example in a parable to focus us on our heavenly Father's disapproval and disappointment when repentance and following him is not high on our priority list. Just as Jesus asked the Pharisees and chief priests he asks us, “What do you think? Who deserves to be forgiven? Who does Jesus forgive?”

With any parable, it is important for us to understand why he is telling it and who he is telling it to. Jesus told this parable on the Tuesday of Holy Week. Although, Jesus had made his entry into Jerusalem amid the shouts and cheers of the ordinary people, the Pharisees and Chief Priests were watching and waiting for an opportunity to get rid of him. But Jesus does not hide. He goes into the teeth of the storm. He goes to the Temple, and there, on one of the porches of the outer courts he begins to preach. While he was preaching, the Chief Priests and the Pharisees of the people approached Jesus and challenged his authority to be preaching and teaching. **By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you the authority?**

The hearts of these men were already far away from faith in Jesus. They cared more about their own power and privilege than about true faith. In their opinion, Jesus had no right to teach that he was the Messiah. He had no right to take people away from their message. They wanted the people to stop listening to Jesus.

Jesus answered their challenge with a question and a parable. He draws them in by asking, **“What do you think?”** You choose.

Jesus offers two choices in his parable. Two sons give their father two different answers and actions when he asks for help. The first son does not honor his father at all, he says no, but then later he thought better of it and went and helped his father. The other son seems to honor his father and says he will help, but in the end he did not go and do as his father asked. Jesus gives them a fairly easy choice, **“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”**

For these religious leaders the answer to this question seemed pretty easy. The Jewish religion had become a religion of works. It did not matter what was in your heart, or what your motivation was, as long as you followed the rules and did what you were supposed to do, you were doing well. For them, the first son went out and did the work his father asked. The first was obviously the correct answer.

Yet, it is here that Jesus shows his parable is much deeper than some sons doing work for their father to get things done. Jesus shows them this parable is about them, their sin, their lack of repentance and their lack of

love for what God actually wanted them to do. Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”**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 parable is about sin, repentance and forgiveness. There was sin involved for each son. For the first son, sin prompted him to say no when his father asked him for help. In the second son, sin prompted him to say yes, but not do what he said he would. Both of the sons had other priorities because of their sins of selfishness and pride. Both had other things that they thought were more important than what their father was asking.

Jesus was telling them that there is sin in all people. He was not denying that the tax collectors and prostitutes sinned, but he was also pointing out that there was also sin in the hearts and lives of the religious leaders.+

Jesus point out that the parable was about repentance. The first son saw his sin, repented of his sin and put his repentance into action and went and helped his father. The second son either didn't see his sin, or didn't care about it. He went away without being sorry about what he had done.

Jesus pointed out that this parable was about forgiveness. Who deserved to be forgiven? Neither of the sons really deserved to be forgiven, they both had sin in their hearts. But the religious leaders thought they had this figured out. They thought their actions earned God's love. They thought they were good enough to deserve God love. On the other hand, they thought there were others who did not deserve forgiveness. They thoughts that sinners like the tax collectors and prostitutes would never be forgiven.

Yet, Jesus turns their own thoughts and teachings against them. With these words he teaches them that those who see their sins and repent of their sins, will get to heaven. Those who do not see their sin, who do not repent of them, will not be forgiven.

These religious leaders thought they were so good at honoring God by their actions, that they had no need for repentance. They thought that they didn't need to repent even if they committed the occasional sin because they were so good in their other actions. They were like the second son who seemed to honor his father with his words, but then his heart was far from his father. He walked away without a second thought, not caring what his father really wanted.

None of us deserve to be forgiven, neither did these sons, nor these religious leaders. If forgiveness is earned by work, then we would have a lot to work on. Not only do we have the debt of sins that we have collected from our past, we also continue to add more sins to that debt daily.

Unlike credit cards companies that will eventually cut you off if you max out your credit limit, there is no ceiling to the amount of sin that we can fill our lives with. There is no point at which our debt of sin is maxed out. We continue to sin and those sins are added to our account. No amount of work can pay for the sins that we commit. No amount of work can remove the fact that we are born in sin. We don't deserve to be forgiven.

Still, there is a little Pharisee that lives inside each of us that wants to believe that we are good enough to deserve God's forgiveness. We want to think that we are better than some people and because of that, God loves us a little more than those others. We think that there are sins that we don't really have to repent of because God overlooks them. There are times that we do exactly what these religious leaders did, we think we are good people and God loves us because of that goodness. We honor God with our lips, but our hearts are far from him. We walk away from God never giving our sins a second thought and certainly not repenting of them.

Who deserves to be forgiven? Nobody stands before God deserving of his grace and mercy. This is why the message of the Gospel is so wonderful. Even though we do not deserve to be forgiven, who does Jesus forgive? We see the great love and mercy of our Savior when we see that Jesus offers forgiveness to all, even the worst of sinners like you and me.

Jesus shows this parable is about repentance and the actions that flow from a repentant heart. Both sons sinned, but Jesus pointed out that one son repented of his sin and showed his repentant heart by actions that flowed from his repentance. Jesus says this son represents the many people who sin and turn from their sin to him in repentance, these are the ones that are forgiven. **I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.**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.

These religious leaders said the right things and tried to act the right way, exactly as the second son did, but in the end, their hearts were far from God. Jesus showed them that their actions were actually very far away from him. In the end they had no repentance, they had no faith in the Savior.

Jesus calls out to both the tax collectors, the prostitutes and the chief priests and the Pharisees. To him, there was no difference, both sinned, both needed to be forgiven. He calls out to all of us. Jesus wants all people to hear his message of forgiveness and to turn to him in faith to know the forgiveness that he offers.

Part of the heart of a Christian, something that flows from our faith is repentance. The Greek word **μεταμέλομαι**, repent, means to change one's mind. True repentance comes from faith in the forgiveness that Jesus has won for us. Faith in Jesus leads us to change our mind about our sins. Our sins are not mistakes, missteps, or problems. Our sins are serious and are dangerous leading to eternal death. But through Jesus, our sins are forgiven. This faith in the forgiveness that Jesus gives, moves us to want to stop our sinful actions, to separate from the temptation, to remove ourselves from that which leads us, or tempts us into sin. Finally, faith leads us to do what God wants us to do in this life.

Who did Jesus forgive? Jesus own words show that forgiveness was given to the tax collectors and sinners not because they were good people or were so good at following the rules. They were forgiven because they believed in Jesus and that faith motivated them to repent of their sins and turn from their sinful ways and to turn to what Jesus told them to do.

Jesus gives us that picture in the end. Those who were called sinners by the religious leaders were getting into heaven before the religious leaders. Until the religious leaders turned from their sins to Jesus in true repentance, they would never enter the kingdom of God. They would be waiting outside of heaven counting their own deeds as the people they looked down on in life were given the blessing of heaven through faith in Jesus.

What do you think? Thanks be to God that undeserving sinners like you and me can have the assurance of forgiveness of sins. Thanks be to God that by the Holy Spirit, God does strengthen our faith so that we can turn from these sinful actions to actions that are more God-pleasing. Lord, help me to repent of my sins every day and lead me to live my life in a way that thanks and praises you. Help me to do what you want me to do. Amen