

Come and Listen: The Parables of Jesus
Walk the Walk...Cliché or Conviction?
Matthew 21:28-32

July 15, 2018

Dr. Steve Horn

Introduction to the Text: We are in a series for the summer on the Parables of Jesus. Jesus was a master story teller. People of Jesus' day were not really any different from people of today in the sense that they related to stories. Jesus took these stories using the familiar things of everyday life in the first century to capture the attention of His listeners. We have observed that the parables related to farming, family life, culturally familiar things of their day.

We have observed that Jesus told these stories in such a way that at some level the shock value of the story is what arrested the attention of the listeners. That is certainly true in the parable before us today.

Text: ²⁸ "What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'My son, go work in the vineyard today.'

²⁹ "He answered, 'I don't want to,' but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ Then the man went to the other and said the same thing. 'I will, sir,' he answered, but he didn't go. ³¹ Which of the two did his father's will?"

They said, "The first."

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him. Tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; but you, when you saw it, didn't even change your minds then and believe him.

Introduction: The story is told that in the summer of 1805, a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in council at Buffalo Creek, New York, to hear a presentation of the Christian message by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. Among other things, the chief said:

Brother, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book?

Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest, and less disposed to cheat us, we will then consider again of what you have said.

I suspect that this same story could be repeated over and over again by all generations and all cultures who have wrestled with the validity of the Christian message.

I don't know where I first heard it, but many times in life I have heard some version of what even might sound like a cliché. That is, "Don't talk the talk, but walk the walk." Another version is . . .

Your talk talks and your walk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks.

In a sense this is what Jesus is addressing in this rather short parable about two sons. When Jesus told this parable, He had already entered Jerusalem for the final week of His life. He has been gloriously ushered into Jerusalem in what we call the Triumphal Entry. They hailed His coming into the city. (Talk talks.) However, the Triumphal Entry quickly turns into the Cleansing of the Temple, the indignation of some over what children are saying about Him, and then the cursing of the Fig Tree which is a serious indictment of the religious crowd of the day. Entering the Temple again, the religious leaders began to challenge His authority. This prompts a discussion about John the Baptist which then led to this parable.

Explanation of the Text:

Let us quickly outline the text.

- A Shocking Story—Neither son had displayed model behavior, but one obviously worse and the other a change of behavior illustrative of repentance. The earlier parable of the younger and older sons comes to mind.
- A Simple Question—What do you think? Which of the two did his father's will?
- A Self-evident Answer—The answer was so obvious. The text indicates a two word answer: "The first."
- A Startling Conclusion—Jesus shifted the story on them (and us) from mere story to personal reality.

Application of the Text: So What?

1. The parable's purpose is to be a mirror not a window.

Temptation: The temptation here is to say, "This parable is not about me."

Truth: There is a bit of Pharisee in all of us.

2. Looking into spiritual mirrors, though usually painful is always pivotal.

Either Honesty which leads to correction

Or hardening which leads to rejection

You want to know where you stand with the Lord? Most already know. We just have to admit it.

3. Though the parable may sound like a cliché to some, it presents the consistent pattern of an authentic relationship to God.

Listen to the Old Testament

- 1 Samuel 15:22—To obey is better than sacrifice

Then Samuel said:

Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the LORD?

Look: to obey is better than sacrifice,
to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.

- Psalm 51:16-17—You do not want a sacrifice...the sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit.

You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it;
you are not pleased with a burnt offering.

¹⁷The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit.

You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God.

This principle of the Old Testament is very much confirmed in the New Testament.

- James 1:22—Not just hearers, but doers

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

- James 2:14-26—faith without works is dead

- Colossians 2:6—Just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in Him

So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,

And, then, hear the words of Jesus.

- Matthew 15:8—This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me.

This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me.

- Matthew 7:21—Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord”. . .

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the
one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Jesus’ story reminds me of another story—a story told centuries before Jesus told His story.

So the LORD sent Nathan to David. When he arrived, he said to him:

There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very large
flocks and herds, ³but the poor man had nothing except one small ewe lamb that he had

bought. He raised her, and she grew up with him and with his children. From his meager food she would eat, from his cup she would drink, and in his arms she would sleep. She was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man could not bring himself to take one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for his guest.

⁵ David was infuriated with the man and said to Nathan: "As the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! ⁶ Because he has done this thing and shown no pity, he must pay four lambs for that lamb."

⁷ Nathan replied to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from Saul. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you and your master's wives into your arms, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah, and if that was not enough, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why then have you despised the LORD's command by doing what I consider evil? You struck down Uriah the Hethite with the sword and took his wife as your own wife—you murdered him with the Ammonite's sword. (2 Samuel 12:1-9)

This is a pivotal moment. How will you hear? Is there something you need to hear? Will you humble yourself, and respond in repentance. Or will you hear, harden, and reject God's Word and will?

Your talk talks and your walk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks.

Is this going to be a sweet Christian cliché in your life or will you allow this to be a word of conviction and correction in your life?