

# The DAILY JESUS NEWS #253

Tuesday... Day of Testing and Teaching

Jesus Rebukes the Leaders With the Parable of Two Sons

MT 21.28-32

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, *“Truly I tell you, 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. Even after you saw this, you refused to repent and believe him.”*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = <sup>MT</sup>, Mark = <sup>M</sup>, Luke = <sup>L</sup>, John = <sup>J</sup>, Acts = <sup>A</sup>. This “superscript ID” is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Temple Courts in Jerusalem
Timeline	Early April (Month 39)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VIII: Passion Week
	C. Tuesday: Day of Testing and Teaching
Title	3. Jesus Rebukes the Leaders With the Parable of the Two Sons

COMMENT:

In the previous reading we saw how Jesus refused to give the Jewish leadership further revelation of God's will, when they persisted in refusing the face the truth of what they had already been shown by God through John the Immerser. Today, we begin a series of three parables in which Jesus showed the leaders the character of their disobedience, and its consequences. Matthew was the only gospel writer to include two of these parables, including today's reading.

These parables are an excellent reminder of why Jesus used parables in his teaching. They were intended to give him a way to speak to his enemies, when direct address would not receive a hearing from them. By veiling his message in a lively story Jesus was able to engage people who would not otherwise listen to him at all. Note that in this sequence of three parables, the Jewish leaders caught on that Jesus was in fact speaking to them through them. Parables were masterful, supernaturally wise communication in this kind of antagonistic setting.

The first parable was deceptively simple. The two sons in the story were diametric opposites. The first son was given a command by his father, and was honest in telling his father he had no intention of obeying it. He engaged

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in open rebellion. Later on, he "changed his mind" (the meaning of "repent"), and decided to obey his father. He was an example of the "better late than never" principle applied to the issue of obedience. Jesus said that the prostitutes and tax collectors that had repented at the preaching of John (and Jesus) were like this son.

The other son was given the same command. He said "yes" to his father, when he actually had no intention of obeying him. He veiled his disobedience in a lie, which is hypocrisy. While claiming to obey his father, he remained in disobedience and never repented. The Jewish leaders were behaving just like the hypocritical, continually disobedient son.

The key to the story lay in the question: "Which one of the brothers did his father's will?"

The leaders answered correctly in saying that it was the brother who repented and did his father's will later who actually obeyed him—not the one who said he would, but didn't.

In addition to the direct application to the repentant sinners who had turned in faith to Jesus and begun to obey him, and those who continued to reject him like the Jewish leaders, there is an important lesson about obedience for all of us here.

None of us start out obeying God. Our "default" mode is disobedience, from the moment we were born. It is the best that any of us can do to be honest with God in confessing that we are not obeying him, and then repent to do his will later on.

In the perspective of eternity, it is not when we begin to obey God that is important to him, it is whether we obey him at all that counts. Our obedience is always later than it should be. Yet God rejoices and counts us obedient when we repent and begin to do his will—no matter how "late" it may be. This is the gracious goodness and mercy of God. It is never too late for obedience in this life.

On the other hand, refusing to honestly acknowledge our disobedience for what it is, by using words to cover ourselves, is hypocrisy. This is a truly deadly sin. This was what the leaders had just done by refusing to honestly answer Jesus's question about the authority behind John's immersion. They said "yes" to God all the time in public, yet they were in active rebellion against him in even saying those words.

This was a telling, deeply insightful parable. It packed a powerful punch, in a tiny verbal package. It was vintage Jesus-style communication.

### APPLICATION:

*Is there any behavior pattern, habit, attitude, or action that you are saying "yes, God, I will obey you" concerning, yet you are actually disobeying?*

*The beginning of the solution is acknowledging your disobedience to God for what it is: sin.*

*Is there any area of disobedience that you choose to repent of today?*

*Will you yield it to God for his forgiveness today, and trust him for the power to change your will into joyful submission to his will? Remember, it is never too late to repent and obey him!*