

## **“A Change of Heart”**

### **Matthew 21:23-32**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

October 12, 2014

Our attention this morning turns to one of the boldest parables Jesus told. He did everything but mention the names of his antagonists in this parable, but they knew he was talking about them.

Who were the enemies of Jesus? For the most part, they were the religious leaders who resided in Jerusalem and oversaw the activities in the Temple. This does not include all the religious leaders, but many of them.

Why did they not like Jesus? He exposed their hypocrisy and challenged them to repent.

What were these religious leaders doing wrong? They were taking advantage of the people God called them to serve. Instead of helping those who were struggling to survive, they added to their burdens with endless lists of rules and expectations. They replaced the power of love with the love of power, and their leadership style was no different than the Romans who ruled their land.

Why did these religious leaders do this? They needed the financial support of the commoners to fund their lavish lifestyles and feed their addictions to power, prestige and money. Heavy rules and regulations which favored the religious leaders made this possible.

It was obvious to Jesus these religious leaders did not reflect the heart and nature of God and were not faithful stewards of the covenant God made with Abraham and Moses. These covenants instructed the scribes and Pharisees to be servant-leaders who were to be a voice and advocate for those who were living on the edge of survival. They were to be a blessing to all God's children, not bless themselves at the expense of those they were called to serve.

Not only did Jesus refuse to join their ranks, which incensed them, he repeatedly exposed their hypocrisy, just as John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet and forerunner of Jesus, had done. Using candid and concise words, Jesus told these religious leaders God could not be fooled and would not be mocked. If they did not repent, God would choose other partners to work with and bless, including the people they despised and continually condemned.

I think you understand why Jesus was at the top of the religious leaders “Most Wanted List.” However, Jesus was not intimidated and did not play it safe when he went to Jerusalem

that spring to observe Passover. In the presence of the religious leaders who had already made it known they wanted to arrest and kill him, Jesus told this parable.

“What do you think,” Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees. “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.

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

Which of the two did what his father wanted?” Jesus asked his listeners who were no doubt squirming.

‘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. 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.’ ” (Matthew 21:28-32)

How does this parable speak to us this morning? Let me offer these ideas for you to consider. We need to take our faith seriously. We need to keep our promises. We need to change our minds when we realize we are wrong.

**What does it mean to take our faith seriously?** We put into action what we say we believe.

Faith is not faith until our decisions, lifestyles, values, priorities, work habits and relationships reflect the heart and nature of God.

The purpose of faith is to bring the best out in us and lead us to be honest, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, industrious, grateful, generous, forgiving, helpful, loyal, kind, compassionate and humble. Until our faith inspires us to adopt the mind of Christ and live by the Golden Rule, it is not the genuine, authentic, transforming faith Jesus taught and modeled.

Why is it important we take our faith seriously and let it guide our thoughts and decisions? According to this parable, God does not play favorites. God is always looking for people who are willing to partner with Him to solve problems, pursue justice and bring people together, and God will use and bless anyone who makes him or herself available.

We may place restrictions on people or believe some are more entitled than others to minister in God’s name, but God doesn’t. Anyone who prays “Thy will be done” will get God’s attention and be put into service. This includes sinners like you and me.

**We need to keep the promises we make to God and others.** Broken promises lead to broken dreams and hearts, which can take years to heal and recover.

I wonder if the son in the parable who told the father he would work in the vineyard but never did actually intended to go to work. Did he become distracted? Did he get sick? Did he get a better offer?

It appears it was never his intent to go work in the vineyard. He merely said what he thought his father wanted to hear without giving much thought to the disappointment and hardship this would cause down the road.

Do you know people like this? We all do, don't we.

When was the last time you were guilty of breaking a promise? Why did you not fulfill your commitment?

What distracted you? What made you think it would be all right if you did not follow through with what you said you would do? Did you think you would never be held accountable or your broken promises would not lead to broken hearts and dreams?

Every promise we make in the presence of affirming and encouraging friends will be tested in a hostile environment. Name one that wasn't.

This is why we make commitments. We assume, and rightly so, testing will come, and it does. Be careful what you promise. The wellbeing and happiness of others depend upon you keeping your word.

There is one more lesson this parable teaches me. **When you realize you are wrong, change your mind and go in another direction.**

You have to love the first son who reconsidered his decision not to work in the vineyard. He had a change of heart and acted on it.

When was the last time you changed your mind about something and let others know it? You might have to think about this a while.

What if I asked those who know you best this question? Could they tell me the last time you admitted you were wrong and did something about it?

Why is it so hard for us to change our minds? Is it that we can't stand the thought of being wrong about anything? Do we see this as a sign of weakness or ignorance?

People of faith rise above their ego and need to be right all the time. They listen to others with open minds and hearts and reconsider decisions when new evidence is presented. They suspend their understanding of truth to ponder new findings and information. They refuse to let pride, stubbornness or a closed mind keep them from doing what is in the best interest of everyone whose life will be impacted by their decision.

This particular son teaches me a valuable lesson about life. The road from where we are to where we need to be is rarely a straight one. It has a lot of hills, curves, bumps, detours and intersections. It is easy to make wrong turns and lose our way.

However, faith teaches us that no past decisions need to define who we are or where we can go. With God's help, we can change our hearts and minds and move in new directions, just like the son in this parable did.

**Is this what you need to do today?** I assure you God will draw close and help you every step of the way.