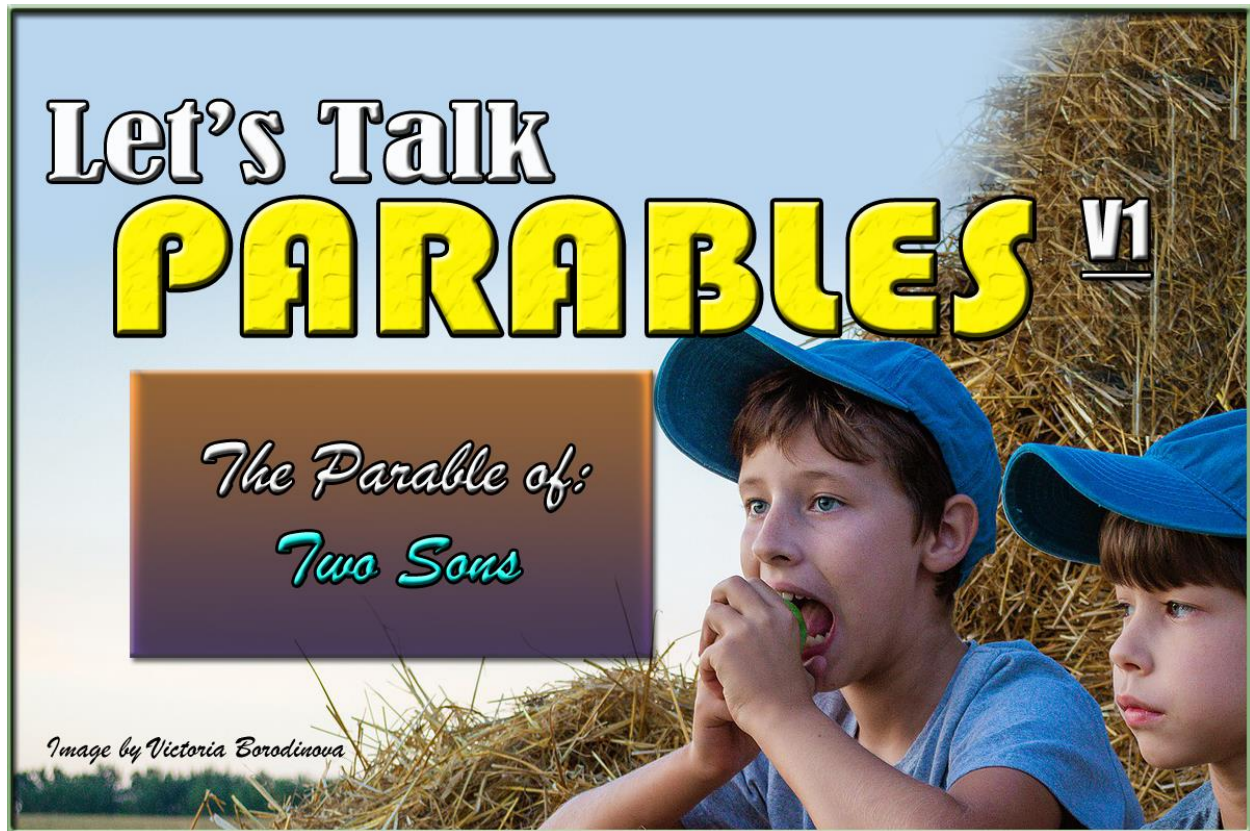


October 17, 2021

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS



Special Music: "No Matter What" Ryan Stevenson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt_xQ4NYtDQ

Matthew 21:28-31

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.

Matthew 21:28-31

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.

Matthew 21:28-32

TWO DAYS

God spoke to me.

I do love God's voice

It's timber resounding

My heart begins pounding

As God fixes my chinks

Unwinding my kinks

And makes my soul....

Whole.

A passionate prayer

Like a breath of fresh air

After a warm, summer rain.

"There's work to do!"

"I'm on it, Lord."

Though I haven't a clue,

But If God want's it done

Then I am the one

Ready to show

My creator how capable I am.

Hand in the air,

Anxious to bear.

A cross I cannot understand!

And off I go.

But then I remember

The car needs repairing

The barn repairing

The fence needs repairing
I lose all my bearing
I should show some restraint.
So many things that make up my day
Things that I find in my way.
I forget God's call
And fall
Into a state
Of rote tasks and
And distracting busyness.
I forget God's timber
And don't quite remember
My promise
Becoming passing thought
A wisp of a memory.... lost.
I lay down my cross.

Another day God speaks.
I do love God's voice
It's timber resounding
My heart begins pounding
As God fixes my chinks
Unwinding my kinks
And makes my soul....
Whole.
God whispers
Taking my breath

As I listen to hear
“There’s work to do!”
I pause.
“Not a good time, Lord,
Not a good time.
I’ve got things to do,
Lay some bricks
Through politics
A world to fix
And intermix.
Maybe tomorrow,
I’ll check to see
If I am available.
Let’s do lunch sometime.”
And I walk away.

And then a bit later.
I realize
What I’ve done
By avoiding the One
And ignoring the Son.
I fall to my knees
With tears and with pleas
“Speak to me Lord,
What needs to be done?
Make me your vessel,
I am undone.
Stiff necked, bull headed

Hubris embedded
Crazy haze of selfish pride.
I brushed you aside.
Forgive me my obstinance.
My days are your days.
My ways are your ways.
Take me aside
Break me, remake me.
Create in me,
A clean heart, oh God.
Cast me a new....spirit
The harvest is ripe
And the workers are few
I'm ready to work
In ways pleasing to you.

Roy Rogers once said, “A man’s only got three things in this life: his handshake, his image, and his word.” And it’s not just men, it’s women as well. In Texas, if you can’t keep your word, it will quickly destroy your reputation. I admit to having broken a number of promises in my life. It has never been intentional. For the most part, I am a man of my word. My father taught me that growing up. I watched him make a number of deals with only a handshake. At one time, that was a common practice here in Texas. Not so much anymore. I’m not sure when that began to change.

I think that it is possible that I am not the only person to go back on his word. The truth is, while we all want to keep each promise we make, life happens. Most of us wouldn’t make promises that we felt we couldn’t keep. Sometimes we make bad decisions. Sometimes we have absolutely no control over what happens. Jobs come and go, finances crash, relationships change, priorities get shifted. Even when we have the very best of intentions in our heart, sometimes we are unable to keep our promises. And people get hurt when that happens, usually innocent people.

We have progressed/regressed to a sad state in this world. We’ve reached a point where so many of our world and government leaders break their promises that we no longer expect them to keep their promises after an election. And they affirm those expectations by doing just that very thing, they fail to keep their promises.

I grew up listening to Walter Cronkite. As far as I was concerned, his word was golden. I wanted to trust word that came out of his mouth. I needed him to

be trustworthy in a world that sought to deceive me. When Walter Cronkite died in July of 2009, I felt it was the end of an era. I wanted someone to step up to the plate and provide me with the same security that Mr. Cronkite had afforded me. If Walter Cronkite said it was going to be okay, I could believe it. It was the same way with Paul Harvey.

But somewhere along the way, the world changed and the voices I trusted became a part of the past. All except one. The only one that really mattered anyway. And when He speaks to me, I feel safe. I feel a blanket of security. I feel at peace. I feel a hope, grace, love, and mercy that transcends the problems of this world. I can trust that voice, that voice that speaks to me in parables making sure that I understand.

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.

Both of these sons lied to their father. Both said one thing but did something else. One said he would go but didn't. The other said he wouldn't go but did. Since we know that both boys lied to their father, the story really isn't

about the truth, even though that is where we want to take it. Now, we need to admit it. We are pretty upset when the first son refuses to go, aren't we? We kind of want the story to be about that. When that boy says "I will not" we want that father to take action and administer some correction. I don't know about you, but I learned early on that "I will not" was not an acceptable answer when my parents asked me to do something. Then the second son promises to go, but doesn't. That is pretty upsetting to us as well. We want this parable to be about honoring your father and mother. But parables are seldom what they seem to be about on the surface.

This is really about two boys, being.... well, boys. I'm not giving them a pass here. I just want to make sure we all understand that the problem is not about lying to mom and dad, even though we know that's a bad thing to do.

Do you remember a time in your life when someone asked you to do something, and you refused to do it? How you felt it was unfair for them to even ask you? It could have been a parent. Or boss. Or a friend. But you also knew in your heart that whatever it was, genuinely needed to be done. So, even though you weren't too happy about it, or about being placed in a compromising position, you just went and did what was being asked of you. I think we have all been there.

At the same time, do you remember at some point doing what son number two did. Make a promise to do something and either had no intention of following through or you allowed distractions to get in your way to a point that whatever it was, it didn't get done? Sometimes we make a promise just to get someone off

our backs. “Yes, I will clean out the garage.... tomorrow.... or maybe when it’s a little cooler.... or maybe when I have more help.... or when I feel more motivated.... blah, blah, blah. But for whatever reason, we just never seem to get around to it.

By now we think we have a handle on this parable. “Don’t make promises you can’t keep.” “Don’t lie to your parents.” “Don’t go back on your word.” But even that is not the point of the story, although those are all good things to consider and embrace. Sometimes parables are about peeling back layers to get to the heart of the story. Jesus asks a question:

31 “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Of course that’s right. The first son did what he was told even though he said he wouldn’t. The job got done. But it still wasn’t right to lie to his father. Right? He may have been obstinate, but in the end he did what was asked of him. Then Jesus continues:

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”

Whoa! That kind of came out of left field. This is not at all where I thought this story was going. Just what is Jesus talking about? We seem to be hearing a story about two boys lying to their father and then suddenly, out of the blue, Jesus is talking about prostitutes and tax collectors entering the kingdom of God before whoever he is telling the story to.

This is one of those stories that Jesus is directing towards the Sadducees and Pharisees. What He is saying here is that the religious leaders know the commandments and what is expected of them. They make sure that everyone knows that they understand scripture. But they don't apply it to themselves. They just want to make everyone else believe that they do. They want to sit in judgement because they believe that they better than others because they understand the law. But understanding and application are two separate things. Remember, that second son knew what he was supposed to do, said he was going to do it, and then.... just didn't do it. That second son is what the religious leaders are all about, spouting scripture with no context to their own lives.

Meanwhile, those very people that the Sadducees and Pharisees take such pride in shaming, may not be able to quote the scriptures, or pray loudly on the corner in everyone's sight, or pretend to be something they are not; those people are getting the message. They are taking care of business. They are doing the right thing, even if it is in trials and the midst of sin in their lives. They are doing what needs to be done. They are going to go to the head of the line in front of the religious leaders when it comes to entering heaven.

Jesus takes time to explain all this to everyone who is there by saying in verse 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.

Even though sin had ruled their lives, the tax collectors and prostitutes chose to embrace the message of John, the way of righteousness. But the religious leaders did not. They chose to ignore the message, even as it was exemplified right in front of them. They refused to accept the truth that John was speaking. They refused to see the error of their ways. They refused to acknowledge their sin before God, all the while pretending to say ‘YES’ to God’s commands and instructions. Whereas the those judged as sinful were embracing the message even though they had at one point said “NO” to God’s commandments. They did an about face, accepting and believing the message of God’s grace and mercy.

How does all that apply to us? Here it is in a nutshell. If we truly believe that the Bible is telling us, if we truly embrace our relationship with Jesus Christ, If we believe that He lived, died on the cross and rose again, if we understand that His death was in atonement for our sinful ways, then we acknowledge that we are sinful and in need of the salvation that he offers to us. That we can become new

creatures before our creator. And even though we have refused to do what was asked of us in the past, we are ready to do what God is asking us now. Not only ready, but actively pursuing what God is asking us to do.

We need to think about the opportunities that God places in our paths each day and diligently pursue them. We are not called to lip service. We are called to participate in a life dedicated to our savior. We need to invite our neighbors to church, support community events, lift up those around us in prayer, engage with people where they are. It is our purpose.

AMEN

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