

“To repent” means to change your mind. When you were committing that sin you thought it was a good idea, but now you realize that it was a bad idea to disobey God and so you change your mind, you repent. In the parable today, Jesus tells us about a son who changed his mind. The father went to his son and said, “Son, go work in my vineyard.” And at first the son said, “I will not!” This is a very disrespectful son. Notice that he doesn’t even address his father with a title of respect. He doesn’t say, “I’m sorry father, I can’t today.” Or “Sir, I’m sorry I can’t go right now.” He doesn’t say “father.” He doesn’t say “sir.” He just very disrespectfully says, “I will not.” Now in our culture it is still disrespectful to disobey your parents. But in their culture they had a heightened sensitivity to disrespecting their parents. Of course that’s something we should regain in our culture. So when Jesus’ hearers heard the son in the parable say, “I will not,” they would have been shocked by his disrespect. But later this son changed his mind. He thought, “I was wrong to be so disrespectful. I’ve broken God’s fourth commandment, ‘Honor your father and mother.’ I’m sorry. I’ll go to the vineyard and work.” And the crowd agrees with Jesus that that son ended up obeying his father.

Now this son in the parable is the tax collectors and the prostitutes. Prostitutes were obviously very disrespectful to God. God forbids any sex outside of marriage, and not only did the prostitutes have sex outside of marriage but they took money for it. They were very disrespectful to God. But then some of them changed their mind. They thought, “I was wrong to be so blatantly disrespectful to God. I’ve broken God’s sixth commandment, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ I’m sorry. I repent.” They changed their mind and repented and they trusted in Jesus for forgiveness. So these former prostitutes ended up being forgiven and obedient daughters of God!

Also the tax collectors, like the first son, had been very disrespectful to God. What tax collectors would do is they would come up to people and they would say, “You owe \$300 in taxes.” When the person actually only owed \$100. And the tax collector would keep the rest. The tax collectors were stealing from people. And the Romans government didn’t care and so the tax-collectors got away with stealing. But again, some of them changed their mind. They said, “I was wrong to be so blatantly disrespectful to God. I’ve broken God’s seventh commandment, ‘You shall not steal.’ I’m sorry. I repent.” Some of these tax collectors changed their mind and repented and trusted in Jesus for forgiveness. And they also produced what John the Baptist called fruits of repentance. They did what they could to give back the money they had stolen. So these former thieves ended up being forgiven and obedient sons of God.

But an important question we haven’t answered yet is, “*Why* did they change their minds? How do we explain such a radical change in behavior?” These people had been prostitutes, but now they changed their minds and become obedient daughters of God. The tax collectors had been very successful thieves. But they changed their minds. They gave that up and became obedient sons of God. How do we explain such a radical change in behavior? Why did they change their mind? Jesus says that it was because of the preaching of John the Baptist. John the Baptist preached God’s Word. He told them honestly, “A day of judgment is coming. If you continue to disobey God’s sixth commandment, ‘You shall not commit adultery’ and if you continue to disobey God’s seventh commandment, ‘You shall not steal.’ You are going to be thrown into the fire of hell. But change your mind. Repent. Be baptized and wash your sins away. Trust in Jesus for forgiveness and instead of entering the fire, you’ll enter the kingdom of heaven.” God’s Word is a very powerful thing and so a number of tax collectors and prostitutes repented and entered the kingdom of God.

Now there was a second son in Jesus’ parable. And the thing to notice about this son is that there is a discrepancy between his words and his actions. Remember how the first son was at first very disrespectful with his words? He didn’t address him as father or sir, but very bluntly and very disrespectfully said, “No I will not.” Well this second son says all the right words: “I will, sir.” Notice that he addresses his father very respectfully,

“Sir.” And notice that he says that he will go. He says the right thing. But then there was a discrepancy between his words and his actions. He said he would go, but he didn’t.

Now these people in the parable are the Jewish leaders. They said all the right words. Their words were very respectful to the God of Israel. But when they came to hear John they didn’t believe him. And why didn’t they believe him? Because John told them to Repent. And they thought they didn’t have any sins to repent of. They said that they respected the God, but they didn’t believe God when John spoke God’s word to them. There was a discrepancy between their words and their actions. If they respected God, then they should believe what God says.

Is there ever a discrepancy between our words and our actions? There’s a discrepancy between our words and our actions when we very comfortably talk about the sins that society commits and very rightly say that people shouldn’t sin, but then ignore the sins in our own hearts and lives. We say that people shouldn’t sin, but then we ignore the sins in our lives and hearts.

There’s a discrepancy between our words and actions when we say, “Yes, I believe in Jesus,” but then never come to church to hear his words.

There’s a discrepancy between our words and our actions when we say, “Yes, I love God,” but then we never give any money to help those in need or give an offering to church.

We have to admit that sadly many times we are like the second son. We are all words and no actions. We need to change our minds. We need to repent.

You see both sons needed to repent. The first son needed to repent because he was very disrespectful to his father. The second son needed to repent because he was all words and no actions. Both sons were disobedient to their father at some point. But there’s actually a third Son in our passage for today. The third Son in our passage for today is the one who is telling the story and he is the truly and perfectly obedient Son. The truly and perfectly obedient Son is Jesus.

In eternity, the Father said to the Son, go save the world by dying on a cross. And this Son didn’t say “I will not.” He said “Yes Father.” So Jesus wasn’t like the first son. And then he actually went into the world to save the world, so Jesus wasn’t like the second son either. Jesus said yes and he actually went. His actions matched his words. Jesus was the obedient Son all the way to the cross. This parable in Matthew 21 was spoken on the Tuesday of Holy Week, just a few days before Jesus died on the cross. And there on the cross Jesus took away our sins of disrespecting God with our defiant “no”s. And he took away our sins saying “Yes” to God only with our words and not also with our actions. Jesus took away all our sins there on the cross. Believe in this obedient Son.

Believing in Jesus as the Savior is what really changed the minds and the hearts of the tax collectors and prostitutes. Notice how much Jesus in the parable emphasizes their faith, their believing. **“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 [believe him]. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”** What did the tax collectors and prostitutes believe? Well they certainly believed John that a day of fire and judgment was coming. But they believed something more. They believed John when he said that “There is someone coming after me. He’s going to baptize with the Holy Spirit. He’s the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” They believed John when he told them about the Savior, THE Obedient Son who would take away the sins of the world. Faith in the Savior is what turned tax collectors and prostitutes into obedient sons and daughters of God. Faith in the Savior is what motivates us to be obedient sons and daughters of God. Faith in the Savior is what ushered them in to the kingdom of God. Faith in the Savior is what ushers us too into the kingdom of God. Amen.