

PLOT TWIST

"IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS" MATTHEW 21:28-32

This Week's Core Competency

Humanity – I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior. John 3:16, *For God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Today's text speaks to the reality that repentance and belief exist in two concentric circles relative to the life of a believer. The inner circle pertains to our 'position' before God received by his grace through faith (i.e. belief, trust; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:4-7) in the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. At that moment, a person is forevermore in a right relationship with God. We are forgiven by God and declared righteous (i.e. justified) in his sight. Our position before God will never change because it is based on the work of Jesus Christ alone. This is a beautiful and irrevocable free gift from God (Jn 3:16; 5:24) for us who believe.

Yet, 'repentance' is always adjoined with this inner circle of belief or, saving faith (cf. Ac 20:21; see also: 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Here, repentance means: 'a change of mind' regarding our sin/sinfulness, to acknowledge our sin as rebellion against God and worthy of divine punishment (cf. Ro 1:32), and possessing a desire to walk in a different, God-honoring direction. This aspect of repentance, along with authentic belief in God's Son, always accompanies salvation. In fact, "from the teachings of Christ in the Gospels, it appears that when the term

Repent and Believe.

– Jesus

repentance is used in relation to salvation it [is] almost always an interchangeable synonym for faith, rather than an action distinct from faith" (Wendell Johnson, *The Theological Wordbook*, 298).

The outer circle of repentance and belief pertains to how we 'practice' our faith on a day in/day out basis. This outer circle relates to our *fellowship* with God in light of our permanent relationship to him. As we seek to walk obediently by faith, our practice becomes more closely aligned to our heavenly position. However, until we are separated from the presence of sin (either through our physical death or via Christ's return) our practice will always fall short of our position before God. 1Jn 1:8 states, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (See also Ro 7:7ff). This is where repentance and belief take on a daily measure of significance.

To 'confess' is the act of acknowledging or agreeing that something is true. Unconfessed sin hinders the closeness in which God desires to fellowship with us in our relationship with him. Verse nine in 1Jn 1 provides a welcomed panacea to verse eight. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Since we all struggle with sin every day, this passage sums up well how repentance is to be a daily discipline in the life of a believer.

So, how should belief impact our daily life? The answer: in every way! We make lifestyle choices based upon what we believe to be true in any given situation. If we sincerely believe in the truth and promises of God revealed in Scripture, we will choose, with increased frequency, to respond rightly (i.e. obediently) to his testimony to us.

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In today's passage, Jesus praises those considered to be the most loathsome of humanity because in due time, they did *rightly* "repent and believe" (v. 32) in both senses listed above. The religious leaders on the other hand did not. Jesus' stark indictment upon them is this: their failure to repent and believe in the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus' own teachings evidenced that they were not actually in a right relationship with God at all. As a result, Jesus tells them, "tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom ahead of you" (v. 32).

Expressing sorrow for our sins and confessing them daily before God (and to trustworthy fellow believers—Jas 5:16) leads us to repentance and greater belief unto obedience. Likewise, it affirms the authenticity of our saving faith to all humanity who still need to know of the transforming power God's "way of righteousness" through Jesus Christ, our Savior and King (See Ro 12:1-2).

day 1 **ENCOUNTER** – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 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. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

See also verses 23-27

23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight the question in v. 28.
- * Circle "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 29.
- * Underline "changed his mind" in v. 29.
- * Circle "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 30.
- * Highlight the question in v. 31.

- * Box the answer given in v. 31.
- * Double underline Jesus' response in v. 31.
- * Circle "For" indicating *reason* in v. 32.
- * Circle "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 32.
- * Circle "And" indicating *conjunction* in v. 32.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Read Mt 21:23-27. Summarize what happened leading up to the events in today's passage.

2. To whom is Jesus speaking? In light of its historical context, what makes this significant?

3. Who are the main characters in Jesus' parable?

4. Whom do you think the father represents? How so?

5. Whom does the first son represent? How so?

6. Whom does the second son represent? How so?

7. How do you think Jesus' audience (Question 2) is 'guilty' similarly to the second son?

8. What 'twist' does Jesus project upon his hearers?

9. How would you describe God's "way of righteousness"?

10. **Discussion:** Talk about the difference between "conviction of sin" vs. true "repentance."

Chapter 21 begins with the 'Triumphal Entry' of Jesus into Jerusalem to present himself to Israel as her King. The city is "stirred" by the commotion (v. 10) but Jesus' devotees assure the citizens that all is well. "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee," they reply (v. 11). Jesus enters the temple court and wastes no time exerting his divine authority as Israel's king by overturning the tables of the corrupt money changers and animal traders. He rebukes the temple leaders strongly: "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers" (vv. 12-13; emphasis mine). He then demonstrates his authority to upend the Pharisee's 'base of operations' by healing all the "blind and the lame" that comes to him (v. 14). But it matters not. The dissenting religious elites become all the more "indignant" (v. 15).

The next day, Jesus is once again within the temple courts, teaching (v. 23). The temple leaders interrupt him to call the source of his authority into question (v. 24). Not surprisingly, Jesus perplexes his critics with a question of his own. "John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men" (v. 25)? Professing ignorance, they offer a cowardly response (v. 27a). In turn, Jesus refuses to answer their question regarding the source of his authority (vv. 27b). With a tongue-tied, yet captive, audience Jesus moves without haste into three piercing parables that "in sequence, depict God's indictment, sentence, and execution of the present Jewish leadership" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 320).

Jesus begins with customary Jewish rhetoric, "What do you think?" (v. 28a), to rouse their attention. The story is simple enough. A man wants his two sons to work in his vineyard. The first son initially says "No," but later "changed his mind" and goes to the vineyard (v. 29). The second son initially says "Yes," but then he does not go to the vineyard (v. 30). No more details are given and, in fact, none are necessary. The answer to his following question is obvious. Jesus asks: So, "which of the two did what his father wanted?" Without hesitation, the chief priests and elders rightly respond, "the first" (v. 31). Jesus' detractors effortlessly walk right into Jesus' parabolic snare. There will be no escaping the object lesson to come.

Jesus indicts them, saying, "I tell you the truth,

the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (v. 31c). During this time, tax collectors and prostitutes were the most loathsome of sinners and societal outcasts. In the parable, 'first son' represents them. Despite their initial rejection of God, they "changed [their] mind" (cf. v. 29) and come to believe God's "way of righteousness" according to John the Baptist and Jesus' testimony (v. 32; cf. Jn 1:15-18; 8:12ff). The transformation that takes place in their life can be true of any sinner (i.e.—unbeliever) today who responds by faith to Jesus' testimony—"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

The religious leaders (i.e. the 'second son' in the parable) are undoubtedly incensed about this bold, condemnatory (cf. Jn 3:18) statement. But before they utter a word, Jesus provides the reason his statement is true. "For John came to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did" (v. 32a, emphasis mine). Ouch! A 'Jesus-burn' if there ever was one! Adding insult to injury, Jesus states, "And even after you saw this [i.e. the right response of the tax collectors and prostitutes], you did not repent and believe him" (v. 32b).

Upon close inspection, it seems the parable (v. 28-30) is somewhat 'out of alignment' with Jesus' expositional comments that follow (v. 32). In the parable, the first son did what the father "wanted" (cf. v 31) whereas the second son said he would do what the father wanted, but then, did not. However, Jesus' closing words (v. 32) seem to pertain to salvation (i.e. "entering the kingdom of God"). The parallel is between what the earthly father 'wants' with, practically speaking, what our heavenly Father 'wants.' In each case, *a right response* is desired.

Despite their initial "No," we see 'first son' sinners respond rightly to God's "way of righteousness" (see Jn 2:23; 4:39, 53; 8:30; 10:42; 12:42; 17:8). By contrast, the self-righteous 'second sons' appear as if they will do the right thing, knowing the Hebrew Scriptures as they presume. But, they do not respond rightly after all to either John or Jesus' testimony (see Jn 1:19-27; 5:16-47; 7:45-52; 8:12ff) regarding God's "way of righteousness." These religious leaders, of all people (cf. Ro 9:3-5), should have recognized the

authenticity of John the Baptist's ministry and of Jesus' signs, wonders and fulfillment of messianic prophecy, but they did not. Their lack of obedience to the Father's will demonstrate their fundamental disbelief in God and his way of righteousness.

By the evening, Jesus sees that the die of Israel's final rejection of him is cast. In Matthew

23, he pronounces seven 'woes' upon the Pharisees and conniving teachers of the law before voicing his last, lamenting words against them. "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (v. 37).

The Message of the Passage

*Beware that a disobedient disposition can indicate a disbelieving heart–
God's way of righteousness is for us to repent and believe in his
Son and afterwards to walk in obedience to His will.*

day 4 EMBRACE – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 living questions to apply what you have learned this week.

- Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes N STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 28 **vineyard**

"The vineyard provides a common enough Galilean setting to work (20:1; 21:33) [yet] it is not impossible that Matthew sees more significance in it as well (Is 5:7; cf. 21:33-44)" (Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 507). Says another, "The vineyard represents the father's line of work: sowing, reaping and harvesting—all associated with the extension of the kingdom of God" (Spiros Zodhiates, *Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 331).

v. 29 **changed mind**

"To change one's mind about something with the probable implication of regret. The same verb is used in v. 32" (tn 6, NET Bible). "A distinction in Greek exists between the verbs *metanoeo*, to change one's mind, and *metamelomai*. The former is frequently associated with the coming to faith in the gospel (Ac 11:18; 2Ti 2:25, 26), whereas the latter is a general anxiety about the future (*melo*). Persons may repent (change their minds) for many other reasons besides concern for the future, and so the verb *metanoeo* is a broader genus [more general] of which *metamelomai* is a species [more specific]. Here, on mature reflection, the first son finally realized that rebellion against his father would have bad long-term consequences. His concern for his future changed. This change of concern (*metamelomai*) produced a repentance of thought and action (*metanoeo*)" (Zodhiates, 331-32). See also 2Co 7:10.

v. 31

"Here for the first time our Lord makes an open, personal application of a parable to the Jewish authorities. (So also in v. 43ff.) The time has come for speaking out unreservedly to them, and also to the people concerning them, as he will do later in the day (chp. 23)" (John A. Broadus, *Matthew*, ACNT, 439).

v. 31 **tax collectors**

"[Tax collectors] were very unpopular, and often very wicked (See 5:46). To these he adds the class everywhere most despised, and too often regarded as beyond the reach of religious influence" (Broadus, 439). Says another, "Publicans and harlots! The phrase was proverbial to denote all that was vile, loathsome, and alien to the feelings of the pure, the respectable and the patriotic. To tell the proud, self-satisfied zealots for righteousness, that the moral scum of society was nearer the kingdom of God than they, was to offer them a mortal and unpardonable insult" (Alex B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*).

v. 31 **prostitutes**

"Although some rabbinic accounts of prostitution in Palestine suggest foreigners, prostitutes also existed in Jerusalem in the Second Temple period. Scripture forbade Jewish practice of prostitution (Dt 23:17), though it reports that it occurred (cf. Ge 38:15-16). Jewish teachers generally resented prostitution as immoral and dangerous and as primarily a Gentile practice" (Keener, 508).

v. 31 **ahead of**

"Ahead of" can mean *instead of* but may also mean *before*, leaving the parable deliberately open-ended.

v. 32 **righteousness** (way of)

In this context, Jesus is speaking of the moral standard by which true believers are to walk. Thus, "ethically, it is a state of moral purity or doing that which is right (Ps 96:13; 97:6; 106:3)" (Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 242). In not doing what is right (i.e. to affirm the authority of John and Jesus' testimony and respond rightly to it), these Pharisees and teachers of the law also exposes their patent disbelief in the God they profess to know.

v. 32 **John**

"While the analogy can be applied to God (or even Abraham, according to Gal 4:22, 23) as the Father of the two children, one born according to the flesh (the Law) and the other according to the Spirit (the promise), Jesus now applied the parable to the ministry of John the Baptist whom He likened to the father of a disobedient child (represented by the chief priests and elders) and an obedient child (the harlots and prostitutes)" (Zodhiates, 334). Note: "for *John* came to you" (emphasis mine) in Jesus' exposition of the parable. Says another, "Jesus is still addressing the officials who refuse to accept his divine authority or to acknowledge John's prophetic ministry. So Jesus refers to John again. The "way of righteousness" makes clear that the correct answer to Jesus' question about John [v. 25] is that his authority comes from God. [Therefore] the correct answer to the question about John the Baptist's authority, namely that it came "from heaven," will imply that they should give the same answer to the question about Jesus' authority" (Blomberg, 322, 20).

v. 32 **repent**

See "v. 29 change mind" above.



Connect the **FAMILY**. Kids Kindergarten thru 6th grade receive Kid Pix tokens for discipleship activities completed during the week.

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Early in my motherhood experience I heard a piece of advice that resonated with me. The speaker told parents to make it a priority to have a personal relationship with each child. When the child values the relationship, he or she will work to please the parents. At first it seemed odd to desire that my kids would want to please me, but Jesus did just that. "I do nothing on my own but speak what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." (John 8:28-29) Obedience is key in our relationships with our kids and with our Heavenly Father. I must ask myself each day if I am inclined to please myself or him? Jesus didn't just come to the earth to save me from my sin, he also came to live inside me and teach me how to live so that the world sees him. I bring glory to him through my obedience. In our parable this week, the son who obeyed, even though he said he wouldn't, pleased the father through his actions. The other brother might have had good intentions, but love and obedience are verbs. I'm asking the Lord to help me deny myself and choose to obey him at every opportunity this week.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Mt 21:28-32

1. What did the first son do when his father asked him to work the vineyard?
2. What did the second son do when asked the same thing?
3. Which son did what the father asked?

What Do You Think

It is our natural desire to do the things we want to do. Sometimes your parents or God will ask you to do things you don't want to do or are hard to do. What is your response? How do you feel after you obey?

What R U Going To Do

Gather your family and play "Follow the Leader". The only rule is you have to do whatever the leader says. Be safe and wise! Learning to obey God is like that! We listen to Him and then do what he says!

Core Comp

Humanity - I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as our Savior.

Memory Verse

Psalm 119:12 - *Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed Scrolls _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____
Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians 6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.

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