

# Matthew 21:28-32

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on June 10, 2012

## Do you obey the Lord you say you follow?

### Prayer

Father, thank You so much for this day. Thank You so much for Your love for us. Thank You so much for Your Son Jesus. That You demonstrate Your love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. We are wretched sinners who You were so gracious to send Your son to pay the penalty, and we are so thankful. Father, I pray as we look into Your Word today that You will convict us of sin. First, right now that we would confess anything, Lord God, that we will have clean hearts and hands knowing that if we confess our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Father, may our hearts be clean before You. And I pray Your Word would work in us, Lord God; we need that, we are so sinful and we need You to convict us, and correct us, and change us and train us; that we would be adequate equipped for every good work. Thank You for this time, I pray You would use Your Word for Your glory now, and we commit it completely to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### Sermon

We live in a society where many people claim to be Christians. We live in a (by and large) nation that would say that we are a Christian nation. And I would venture to say that if you went to many churches who claim to follow Christ that probably 99% of people in there would say that they're Christians. I would say if I ask you all today who was a Christian, you will probably all say that you are Christians. Now the reality is that although there are many who claim to follow Christ, there are always, unfortunately, some who don't know Christ. And the same was true in Israel's day. They had the Word of truth, like we do here. They had made a covenant with the Lord; they were His people. And yet they were sitting in darkness, as we see. They were sitting in the shadow of death, they had not come to a true relationship with the living God, but they would name His name. As Dennis read earlier in chapter 7 of Matthew, we see that there will be many on that day who will come before the Lord and say, "Lord, Lord." And He says not many – or it says in Matthew 7:21,

***<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. [Matthew 7:21-23]***

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And if you turn with me to Luke chapter 6, we have a parallel passage. And this is towards the nation of Israel; those who would say, “We follow the Lord, we follow the God of Scripture.” Luke chapter 6:43,

***<sup>43</sup> "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. <sup>44</sup> "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. <sup>45</sup> "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. <sup>46</sup> "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" [Luke 6:43-49]***

Why do you say “Lord, Lord” and not obey Him? We’re going to see today, and we’re going to be challenged from the Word of God; are we obeying the Lord God? A lot of us say that we follow Christ, but do we obey the Lord God? And the question I think we are going to see today is, do you say – or do you obey the Lord that you say that you follow? And we are going to see an eternal warning for those who profess to follow the Lord, but yet do not obey the Lord.

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 21. And we are going to be looking at verse 28. Matthew 21, verse 28. Now, I am going to briefly go through the context today. We’ve been studying the book of Matthew; the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ –He has taken on human flesh. And we saw that you would call His name Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins. He has come, as I have shared, to those sitting in darkness, in the shadow of death. We have seen very clearly that He came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

We’ve seen almost three years of ministry where the Lord Jesus has revealed the truth concerning Himself and the truth concerning their sinfulness. And He has affirmed that with the miraculous; that He is the Lord, that He is the Christ. And we’ve seen these Israelites sitting in darkness reject him. They’re apathetic about Him, they would not see Him for who He claims to be, although they were excited about the things He could do for them. We’ve seen the leaders turn in their heart to attempt to destroy the Lord Jesus Christ. And we’ve seen the Lord Jesus turn away from the multitudes per se, and hide and veil His truth, so that “Seeing, they would not see, and hearing, they would not hear” because they had closed their eyes and closed their ears to His truth.

And we saw and have come to the last week of our Lord Jesus’ life on earth before He would be crucified and raise from the dead. And I want to just briefly review the events of this last week as we move towards a situation today in which we’re going to see very clearly the Lord challenge those hypocrites who would have an outward profession of following the Lord, but yet inwardly would not follow him. So we’ve seen so far on Sunday, not this Sunday but Sunday back on Palm Sunday, that Jesus came down from the Mount of Olives, entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey; humble, not as a victorious conquering King, but as a humble King. We saw in Luke chapter 19, He was weeping, because Israel had not recognized their day of visitation. God had visited them and they did not recognize it, so that they would ultimately be judged, and Jesus is weeping over that. We saw the crowds of what we would call

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the *Triumphal Entry* shouting “Hosanna, to the Son of David in the highest, save now I pray.” The truth concerning the Son, and Jesus didn’t reject that praise. But yet the same who praised Him, would be saying in less than a week “Crucify Him.”

We saw Him in Mark chapter 11 coming to the temple that first day, looking around, and departing back to Bethany on the Mount of Olives to lodge. Then we saw Monday morning on His way to Jerusalem, He saw that beautiful fig tree in leaf, and you would expect that fig tree to have fruit, and it had no fruit. Just like the nation of Israel, they looked great on the outside, which we’ll see today. You may have a great profession, you may look great on the outside, but if there is no fruit you are dead and about to be cursed concerning God’s judgment on sin. We saw Jesus curse the tree and then He went to the temple. He went to the court of the Gentiles, which should have been a place of prayer for the nations, and He drove out all of those buying and selling animals and doves. He also turned the tables and threw out the moneychangers. They had made His house into a house of merchandise; it was a, it was a place for greed. They were using this sacrificial system to extort money from the people. Jesus would have no part of that in His house. And we saw He even went so far to stop people from cutting through the temple. And then He allowed those who were lame and blind -those outcasts who would never be allowed in the temple- to come in, and He healed them. And we saw that He would not stop the worship, as the Pharisees were concerned about those teens worshipping him; He would not stop that worship.

And then He went back to Bethany to lodge that Monday evening. Then the next day, which would be Tuesday, He came back to Jerusalem and that’s where we have the account in the book of Mark where Peter sees the fig tree and he questions Jesus about the withered fig tree. And Jesus clearly reveals ultimately the cause of their withering; the reason why Israel is the way it is - they didn’t have faith. They didn’t trust in the living God, and thus they had no fruit, and thus they are cursed. And we were warned that if our lives do not exhibit a true relationship with the living God; if there is no fruit, no matter how good we look, we are in deep trouble. And God is a gracious God to unveil our hearts apart from how we look on the outside.

And then we have Him entering the temple again (this is Tuesday) and we saw in Luke that everyone was hanging on every word, but yet you had these leaders who were in control of the temple around the perimeter, you see, they were ready to come and question Him. And they come and they ask Him “By what authority do you do these things?” - the teaching, and the healing, and casting out those people. And we saw very clearly that their intent was not to understand the authority but to discredit Jesus. Because they knew He wasn’t a priest, they knew He hadn’t stood under a rabbi, and they wanted to discredit Him in front of the crowds – He’s some teacher that’s elevated Himself. But the Lord Jesus turns the trap back on them and He asked them very clearly, as we will see, a question about John and his authority, where did it come from? If they would have answered, they would know where the Lord Jesus’ authority came from. And we find ourselves in the midst of this accusation, or this trap, and we come to our passage today. And we’re going to see very clearly a series of parables where Jesus is teaching in the final week of His life in the temple. We’re going to see three parables, and today we’ll look at the first of those. These parables the Lord uses to condemn the wicked leadership in the

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presence of the multitudes. We're going to see very clearly the parable today of two very different sons. And it's only in the book of Matthew what we'll see today. Then we will see the parable of the wicked tenant farmers and the parable of the wedding feast or banquet. And then we'll see three accounts of the leadership trying to trap Jesus; one concerning paying taxes, the other concerning the Resurrection, and another considering the great Commandment. And then we will see in the Lord Jesus bringing His final condemnation on these leaders in Matthew 23 - those seven woes upon the religious leadership who looked great on the outside, but on the inside were dead because of sin.

So then, we're in the midst of this final week where Jesus is pouring out condemnation on the leadership of Israel. And so I believe we're going to be confronted with the question "Do you obey the Lord?" You say you believe Him; do you obey Him? We're going to see today that obedience is the fruit of a true relationship by faith with Jesus Christ, no matter what you say. Let's take a look at our passage Matthew 21. And I'm going to back up, reading what we read last week; we went through versus 23 to 27. Today's passage is 28 to 32. And it is altogether, but we did not have enough time last week to look at it, so I'm going to read through what we saw last week, and then we'll look at what we're going to teach today. Verse 23,

***<sup>23</sup>And when He had come into the temple (that's Tuesday morning), the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" <sup>24</sup>And Jesus answered and said to them, "I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup>"The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' <sup>26</sup>"But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet." <sup>27</sup>And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. (And here's our passage here, it links right with what we saw last week) <sup>28</sup>"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' <sup>29</sup>"And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. <sup>30</sup>"And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went. [Matthew 21:23-30]***

And by the way you're probably going "Wait a second, my version has that backwards." But we're not sure which one is backwards, but just on a side note, there are some textual difficulties. It's not sure which portion whether it's the son that says he'll go and doesn't first, or the son that doesn't want to go and then goes; it doesn't matter because it doesn't change it at all. So even though yours may be backwards, just read the verse in front of it and then I will just read from what I have. Okay? And so I'm going to read through that, so we'll talk about that in a little bit. "But he answered and said" – this is in the middle of verse 30 if you have this version - "answered and said 'I will not'; yet regretted it and went." and here's the question the Lord asked in verse 30,

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<sup>31</sup>***“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, (Now one will say the first if it is the one; my version will say...) “The latter.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup>“For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him. [Matthew 21:23-32]***

We are going to see very clearly a story that exposes religious hypocrites. We are going to see a stinging condemnation that reveals their destiny. And we are going to see a sobering explanation which shows the hearts of those religious hypocrites on the way to hell, and the basis of this as we will see is they claim to follow Christ, but they don't obey Him. It's very important to see this. So we have first of all Jesus coming to them. Notice verse 28, “But what do you think?” He is speaking to those religious leaders, and that's important as you go through this portion, this dialogue is to the religious leaders who have confronted Him, and there are the multitudes that are around and He is addressing them; this entire dialogue is to them. He says “But what do you think?”

Now He is going to tell them a parable, and you are going to say “It doesn't say *a parable* there.” But if you look down to verse 33 it says the Lord Jesus says, “Listen to another parable.” So this is a parable. And if you'll remember what the term “parable” means *parabolē*, it means to throw alongside. It's a simple illustration thrown alongside something to illumine an argument. And we saw very clearly to illumine the meaning. We saw very clearly a parable by itself can conceal the meaning unless it is explained. And we'll see today that it is explained. And the Pharisees and Sadducees and all the leaders will have no excuse and they will understand very clearly what Jesus is saying in this parable, and I believe we will too. Whether you know the Lord or not, you'll be able to understand today what Jesus is saying.

So with that in mind we need to remember the immediate context before we get into our passage. Again, look back at verse 23. <sup>23</sup>“And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching,” (and remember He had cleansed the temple the day before) He came back, He was teaching, and we see He was teaching and preaching the gospel (in the book of Luke) teaching and preaching the gospel, and the people were hanging on His every word. And now we have the leaders of the Temple, and this was a theocracy, these were the leaders of Israel. They were the top; they controlled everything; they controlled the temple, they controlled the nation underneath Rome's iron hand. And we have these leaders, the chief priests and the elders of the people coming to him. And if you'll remember from last week (and I'm going to go through it pretty quick) they say to Him “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority? What authority are you doing this?” And remember they just weren't simply trying to establish their authority versus His authority; they were trying to trip Him up. They understood that Jesus was not a priest, so He has no priestly “authority” there. And they understood that He had not studied underneath any particular rabbi; He had no one that He would defer to or refer to. As we heard earlier as Dennis read, Jesus was teaching with authority, not as their scribes. Their scribes would say, “The ancients said this...” They would mention a rabbi's name. Jesus just spoke with authority. And they are saying by

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what authority, trying to trip Him up; you really don't have any authority. But see the Lord Jesus turns that on them and He asked them. Jesus answered and said, verse 24, "I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what *source*, from heaven or from men?"

A perfectly wise response from a perfectly wise God in whom the treasures of all wisdom and knowledge exists. We see very clearly the people understood that John was a prophet. They understood that what He shared was from God. Now, they didn't totally believe it. There were some who repented with the baptism of John, but they did by and large hold Him to be from God. And Jesus is saying "If you acknowledge that, then I'll tell you where my authority comes from;" which obviously is the same thing. And you see how perfectly wise the statement is because if they acknowledge it, as we will see, then they need to recognize the message that John preached, which was repentance for the forgiveness of sins, pointing to Jesus Christ as the Savior. And why didn't they believe it? Notice the wicked leader's reason "And they *began* reasoning among themselves (dialoging among themselves), saying, "If we say, 'from heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?"

If they would've acknowledged John's baptism was from Heaven than they would have needed to repent. And they didn't. They came out, they did the fake thing, and John called him on it "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" So they understood that. ""<sup>26</sup> But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude; for they all hold John as a prophet." And remember, we saw in the book of Luke very clearly, they feared that they would be stoned and put to death by the multitude. It wasn't just a fear; it was a fear for their lives. So Jesus effectively traps these religious leaders in their own wickedness, and for them to answer would really reveal His authority. And how did they answer? ""<sup>27</sup> And answering Jesus, they said," (verse 27) "We do not know." We have a cowardly, unbelieving, lying response. And how does Jesus respond? "Well let me tell you by what authority I do it by." No, He doesn't do that. He said also to them "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

We saw last week that as Jesus dealt with hardened people who had heard the gospel - these people weren't people who had never heard. They had heard for three years, they had rejected the truth. The living God was in their midst proclaiming the truth, and they had rejected that. And so he's not going to tell them. He's not going to answer their question. We see obviously very clearly the Lord Jesus not casting the wonderful truth concerning Himself before swine. We see Him not answering fools according to their folly, as His Word says.

And now we come to our passage today. And again I want to remind you Jesus is in the temple, it's the last week of His life, He is teaching and preaching the gospel, He is healing as we saw, He has rooted out the sin from there, and these leaders have accused Him, and now He is going to lay His condemnation on them. And that's where we come to this point now. After they have tried to trip Him up, Jesus now to them says this in verse 28, "But what do you think?" Think about this. Think about this, is what He's saying. And here's the story: a man had two sons... And remember, I'm going to tell you, it's flip-flopped on two verses. Okay? The same exact thing, but it's flopped, and we'll talk about that in a minute. A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said "Son go work in the vineyard". That's the

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same. And, verse 29 (which might be 30 in some of yours), and he answered and he said “I will, sir”, and he did not go. And then verse 30 (which might be 29 in some of yours) he came to the second and said the same thing, but he answered, “I will not”, yet afterward regretted it and went. Which of the two did the will of his father?

Now again there are some textual difficulties here; not in the story, the story is inspired. It’s just the order. There is thought that maybe some overzealous scribes flopped the order on that. The NASB 77 has it in this order which I have read, the NASB 95 has flipped it the other way, the New King James the other way. And I think as I studied, I actually think I really like the NASB 77, but I actually think it’s probably the other way. As I looked at the manuscript evidence and that, but it really doesn’t matter; it’s the same no matter how you look at it. So to me it is a moot point, okay? So as long as we understand, it is the same no matter what the order is, then let’s just move forward. And as I read it I may be reading 29 and you read verse 30, and vice versa. Okay? And if I’m reading verse 30 and it’s not the same, then you read verse 29. And in verse 31 if I say the latter and it says the first, then you say the first. Okay. Hopefully that doesn’t confuse you anymore. All right, so I believe first of all we’re going to see that He calls upon them to think about it; to think about it. “But what do you think?” He’s speaking to these leaders who have tried to trip Him up; these hardened-heart leaders who were attempting to destroy him.

A man had two sons (it’s a parable) and he came to the first and said “Son go work in the vineyard” and he answered and said (like I said, some will be on 29 and 30 ) and he answered and said, “I will, sir” and he did not go. That’s pretty simple. Your dad comes to you and says “Mow the lawn” and you say “I will, Dad”, and then you don’t go do it. It’s pretty simple, right? Okay. Second one. And he came to the second and said the same thing, which is “Go work in the vineyard.” He’s commanding them to do something. He has authority over them, remember that. But he answers and says, “I will not.” Yet afterwards regretted it, and we’ll see that word means to repent (it’s the same word) and he went. A very simple story. Which of the two did the will of his father? That’s pretty simple, right? Even a hardened heart Pharisee or Sadducee or chief priest or priest could understand this, right? It’s pretty simple. Who did the will? We have genuine obedience in the context of repentance, and we have lip service in the context of hypocrisy. Who did the father’s will? And we’re going to see these two groups relate to two specific groups of people in Israel. They relate to the religious leadership and partially of the nation, and it also relates to those sinners who were outward sinners who responded to the truth that Jesus brought forth through John and then through Himself. So here we have the two specific groups, and I believe we’re go see first of all these groups (if we will move a little farther on our parable, which we’ll zoom forward and then come back) verse 28.

<sup>28</sup>“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ <sup>29</sup>“And he answered and said, ‘I will, sir’; and he did not go. <sup>30</sup>“And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, ‘I will not’; yet he afterward regretted *it* and went. ‘Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said the latter” And the point is the one who repented and did go to the vineyard is the one who did it, whether it was the first or the latter, right? “Jesus said to them “Truly I say to you” This is the leadership. “Tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom

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of God before you.” He’s talking about who the two groups are now. There is the “you” and there are the “tax-gatherers and harlots.” You see, the religious leaders obviously represented, as we will see, the son who said, “I am going to do it” and then did not do it. And obviously we will see those who said they’re not going to do it represent those wicked sinners who did not obey, but yet felt remorse we will see at the preaching of John, and then they did obey. Clearly these religious leaders would say, “Yes, we’ll do it.” but they didn’t do it. Look a little farther to Matthew 23, which we’ll see, Lord willing, in a couple weeks. This is Jesus’ final statement condemning this leadership; it’s His final woes on this leadership in His final week before He would go to the cross. Matthew 23:1,

**<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; <sup>3</sup> therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, (Because they would share the word from the Old Testament. But notice what He says) *but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. [Matthew 23:1-3]***

People say “I follow Christ; I’m a follower of Christ.” And they don’t obey Him. They were saying we follow the Lord Yahweh of the Bible. And they would share His Word, and they wouldn’t do it. We saw back in Matthew chapter 15 (I’ll read it for you) verse eight Jesus says,

**<sup>7</sup> "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, <sup>8</sup> 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.' [Matthew 15:7-8]**

It’s lip service! It’s coming to church on Sunday and saying “Amen!” “Yes!” “Alright!” “I believe” and then disobeying the Lord the rest of the time. It’s hypocritical lip service and that’s what these leaders were. Jesus says do what they tell you, but don’t do what they do, because they don’t do what they tell you. And we see that in Romans chapter 2. Turn there for just a second to Romans chapter 2. The apostle Paul is condemning all of mankind and he uses the Gentiles as an example of pagans to condemn them; they are in sin. And then he uses the religious Jew as an example of those religious apart from Christ. Romans chapter 2:17,

**<sup>17</sup> But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, (Notice that, they say that they are following God, right?) <sup>18</sup> and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, <sup>19</sup> and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup> a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, <sup>21</sup> you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? <sup>22</sup> You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? <sup>24</sup> For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," [Romans 2:17-24]**

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There is nothing new under the sun, folks. There are many people who have very godly looking lives on the outside who are continually, habitually, disobedient to the living God. They know what God says and they don't do it. And it's an evidence of something terribly wrong, and Jesus is gracious to point this out before it's too late. Remember Jesus said many will come on that day and say "Lord, Lord" and we saw in Luke 6:46 "And why do you call me Lord?" Jesus says "And why do you call Me, 'Lord,' and do not do what I say?" There are many people who name the name of Christ, even in godly churches where the truth is proclaimed, who outwardly declare allegiance and obedience to Christ, and yet do not do what He says on a continual, habitual basis. I'm not talking about believers who struggle, who want to, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are broken over their sin and recognize their failings, and want to trust Christ. I'm talking about people who name the name of Christ who don't do what He says. That's what this parable is about. "I will do it." They didn't do it. They didn't do it.

Churches are full of people who say they love Christ but don't obey Him, and those areas of disobedience are pretty clear. God's Word is not vague concerning His requirements in the context of a true relationship with Christ. We are to abstain from sexual immorality. And there are those who name His name who don't. They don't obey. "I'm not going to do it." "I'm not going to do it." We are to be together, not forsaking our assembly. We are to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. And some are saying, "I'm not going to do it, I got other things to do." We are to respond to those in sin very clearly, like we see in Matthew 18 and Galatians 6. Yet there are some who say, "I'm not going to do it." We are to be good stewards of the gifts that God has given us. Yet we say "I'm not going to do it." God's Word says we are not to worry and be anxious, but we say, "I am not going to obey God." You guys all know what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about struggling. Every one of those areas true believers struggle in, and we know that we all trip up and fall. But there are some, and maybe some here today, who have a heart that is not of Christ. And you hear the truth, and you go and do your own thing. And it is an evidence you are in deep trouble; you are in deep trouble. And God is a gracious God to unveil these things. I could name off a whole list of things. Turn with me to 1 John chapter 2. I'm not talking about a legalistic observance of things. I'm talking about a changed heart because of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ that now wants to obey the Lord Jesus Christ and doesn't say "No." I thought that I was saved when I was a kid, and I didn't go to church that much. I didn't serve; I didn't do anything. I had a foul mouth. I didn't obey the Lord, because I didn't know Him, even though I said I did. Some of you, your mouths are foul after you leave here. You're saying that I'm not going to obey Him, because you don't know Him. First John chapter 2,

<sup>1</sup> ***My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin.*** (That's so wonderful! God's Word is so that we won't sin.) ***And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*** <sup>2</sup> ***and He Himself is the propitiation*** (or the satisfaction) ***for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*** (And notice this) <sup>3</sup> ***And by this we know that we have come to know Him,*** (Do you want to know if you know Jesus Christ?) ***if we keep His commandments.*** (Not the Ten Commandments, it's a different word. It's His commands; it's His Word) <sup>4</sup>

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***The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; [1 John 2:1-4]***

If you say I know Christ, and you live your life with a filthy mouth, you don't know Christ. If you say you know Christ, and you have no desire to be with the body of Christ, you don't know Christ. You are a liar. I was a liar. Every one of us are liars. And if you feel remorse because of conviction of sin, as we will see, and you turn to Christ, He'll forgive you. And He'll change your heart, and He'll give you the ability to obey. He'll give you the ability to obey. Folks, if you've repented of your sins - genuinely-you'll obey; you'll want to do the right thing. A change in my life- I wanted to be around the body of Christ, I didn't want to do my other stuff. I was convicted about my mouth; I was convicted about my priorities. I was convicted about my lack of desire of being in the Word. God changed my life. First John 2 is pretty clear, and Jesus is coming to these Pharisees who had really great religious outward fruit in a sense; in terms of their outward - not fruit - but appearance. You see, the Word of God, in the context of a relationship with Christ, enables us to obey. Take a look at the book of Romans chapter 1. You see, when the gospel changes your heart then you obey, not out of compulsion and "you have to," but it brings about the obedience of faith. I don't come here and preach because I have to. Now, I'm compelled to do so because God has commanded me to use this gift. And so I want to be obedient, God's changed my heart. I don't come here just because I have to, it's because I want to be around the body of Christ. Romans chapter 1, verse 1,

***<sup>1</sup> Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (He's speaking of the gospel now) <sup>2</sup> which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake [Romans 1:1-6]***

You see, the Word of God brings about obedience in the context of true faith. If you go to the end of the book of Romans verse, chapter 16; some versions don't show it but it's the exact same phrase "obedience of faith" and I'll point it out. Romans 16:25 (You say it's getting hot in here? It's getting warm, it's good),

***<sup>25</sup> Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, <sup>26</sup> but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; <sup>27</sup> [Romans 16:25-27]***

Obedience of faith. You see, the Word of God, in the context of a true relationship with Christ, will bring about obedience. It's not forced obedience, it is not a checklist of stuff that you do like you would do in a cult. It's a heart change that desires to obey the Lord God in the context of faith, and it is the evidence

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that you have truly been changed. Or not. You can have all the right doctrine, but if you don't obey Christ, if your life is a continual, habitual lifestyle that -- don't fool yourself. Don't fool yourself. Something is terribly wrong. If you don't come to church, if you don't care about the body of Christ; don't fool yourself. Don't fool yourself.

Let's look at our parable again. Verse 28, "But what do you think?" Back in Matthew 21,

***28 A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'* <sup>29</sup>*"And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. <sup>30</sup>"And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went. [Matthew 21:28-30]***

Notice, the second one we're going to see represents tax-gatherers and sinners; the person who said "I will not" and then regretted it and then did, represents those tax-gatherers and sinners who responded to the message of John. Look down a little farther; you look at verse 31 (in the middle),

***Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup>"For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you (Leadership.) did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him. [Matthew 21:31-32]***

Now remember tax-gatherers were those who worked for Rome's IRS; they were those who collected taxes for Rome, they were despised by the Jews. They were considered as sinful traitors having sold out to the Roman government. Matthew, by the way, was a tax collector and he left that to follow Jesus Christ. They were considered sinners by nature because of the way they conducted business. They often extorted and were wicked in the way that they collected their taxes. And they were seen as the worst of sinners in Jewish eyes. And then of course there were those who were openly called "harlots"; those sexually immoral women. They were seen as sinners. They were outright; they didn't hide it. Tax-gatherers weren't hiding their sin, these immoral women were not hiding their sin; they were disobeying God outwardly. They were the sexually immoral and yet in this parable, in reference to these, we see that they felt remorse. They felt remorse. That word "felt remorse" or "regretted it" -- back in our verse 32 "felt remorse" is often translated "repent." It is an important word for us to understand. Let's briefly review repentance because it's so important because that's the key to what's going on in this passage. The term "repent" or "regret" or "feel remorse" comes from the basic Greek term *metanoia*; it speaks of a change of mind, literally perceiving or thinking, a redirecting of thinking. The Old Testament word that is in parallel with it is *shub*, and it speaks of a turning. We see in Ezekiel 18:23 that the wicked die in their wickedness unless they repent.

***"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should (shub, He should) turn from his ways and live?" [Ezekiel 18:23]***

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Ezekiel 18:32,

***“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD.  
“Therefore, repent and live.” [Ezekiel 18:32]***

Turn and live. And we see very clearly in Scripture and in the New Testament also that it is a turning from something and a turning to something. It's not just simply a change of mind with no behavioral change. We see in Scripture there is a change of behavior. We see very clearly in the New Testament that it is a turn from sin. Luke chapter 5:32, Jesus says, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." I've not come to call the self-righteous who think they're fine, but sinners to repentance. It is not those who are healthy who need a physician (Mark 2:17) but those are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, (or literally self-righteous; not literally, but that is what He intends to mean), but sinners. Notice what Peter shares with unsaved Simon in Acts chapter 8 verse 22, I'll read it for you. He said,

***Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours, (metanoeo of this wickedness of yours)  
and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.  
[Acts 8:22]***

Repent. We repent. We turn from sin. Repentance is from sin. It is just like in our parable. They said "Nope." They regretted it, they disobeyed the father's will-which was to go to the vineyard. They regretted it, and they turned, and they did it. They did it. And we're going to see it's not a repentance just based on an action. It is repentance based on the message of truth, coming into a heart and changing someone's desires as we will see; a response to the Word of God in faith that causes repentance. And notice it's a turning to something. We see in the Gospel of Mark verse 15 chapter 1 John the Baptist says, "Repent, and believe the gospel." We see in Acts 19:4 Paul shares John baptized with the baptism of repentance telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him. That is Jesus. That is Jesus.

Acts 20:21, we see that Paul told the Ephesian elders he had been solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In Paul's defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26:20, Paul states that he kept declaring to both those in Damascus first, and also in Jerusalem and all throughout the region of Judea even unto the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate with repentance (Acts 26:20). And we saw in our study of 1 Thessalonians that it is a turning to God from sin; they turned from idols to the one and only true living God. And God makes it clear in His Word that all everywhere should repent. Turn with me to Luke chapter 24; this is after Jesus has risen from the dead. And the problem with these Pharisees and the problem Israel was they did not repent at the preaching of John concerning their sinfulness and the Savior who would come to save them. Luke 24:45,

***<sup>45</sup> Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, (This is Jesus and those disciples) <sup>46</sup> and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and***

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**rise again from the dead the third day;** (verse 47) <sup>47</sup> **and that** (He needs to die and rise, right? And the second thing, that) **repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [Luke 24:45-47]**

And we see the same thing in the book of Acts as Paul is talking to those guys at the Areopagus. Acts 17:30,

**<sup>30</sup> "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." [Acts 17:30-31]**

What is it that brings about obedience, or a repentance and then obedience? Does it just come out of the blue? We see in Scripture that God grants repentance (2 Timothy 2:25). That it is His loving kindness (Romans 2) that leads us to repentance. And we see that it is His Word that He uses to convict us and cause us to turn. We see this in 2 Corinthians chapter 7. And turn there for a second, 2 Corinthians chapter 7. The apostle Paul is talking about a letter that he wrote to these Corinthians concerning their sin and how they had accepted sin in the body of Christ. And he says,

**<sup>8</sup> For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it-- <sup>9</sup> for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-- <sup>9</sup> I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful (What?) to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. <sup>10</sup> For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. [2 Corinthians 7:8-10]**

You see, God's will is revealed in His Word, and sorrow according to the will of God produces repentance without regret. And folks, later on in our passage we will see that the message of John very clearly was a message of repentance and the tax-gatherers and sinners responded ultimately, believing the message, and thus believing in Christ. A very simple story. The religious leader said, "Yes, we'll do it" and didn't do it. We have the other son in that sense who represents these tax-gatherers -the sinners we'll see- who said "No" and they felt remorse. They were moved to repent at the message of John and they turned, and they obeyed. Who did the will of the father? It was the one that turned and obeyed.

So Jesus has confronted these religious leaders; back to our passage in Matthew chapter 21. They are wicked; He has refused to answer their question. He has now called upon them to think about the parable. And He's calling upon us to think about it, by the way. And these hardened sinners, who had rebelled against Christ; they understood the illustration that Jesus made. They knew which one had done the will of God. And later on in the chapter they're going to acknowledge these things- that they understood that Jesus was speaking of them. These hardened sinners very clearly understood. If you're not obeying God from a transformed life, I would ask you to question your salvation. I would examine yourself. I would exam yourself, as we'll see. Many will say "Lord, Lord." "Why do you call me 'Lord,

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Lord' and not do what I say?" Jesus would say. If you say, "I am Christian, I follow Christ, I believe what He says," and yet you don't obey. You don't care about the body of Christ, your agenda's better, you've got a foul mouth - whatever it is - you're in sexual immoral lifestyle. You're saying, "No, I'm not going to obey." And then you come to church and say, "Yes, I agree with everything." We'll see there's a terrible condemnation ahead if you don't repent. Let's look at our passage, verse 31,

<sup>31</sup>**"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The latter." (Some say the first, it's the same thing.) Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. [Matthew 21:31]**

The kingdom of God represents the sphere and reign of the King. You cannot go and be with the King, you cannot be in His sphere - it's parallel to the kingdom of Heaven- unless you have had your sins forgiven because He is a holy God. And now He's sharing this absolute condemnation of Pharisees. He's not saying as some might say, that these tax-gatherers will get in first because He said "before you." It's just the language He's using because He clearly shares later on that they are on their way to hell. They are not getting in at all. Look at Matthew 23 again, verse 25; we don't have time to read the whole chapter, but just because He says they'll get in before you, He's not implying that they'll get in after these tax-gatherers and sinners; He is saying you're not going to get in. These people who were outwardly wicked as we will see, who repented, will enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 23:25,

<sup>25</sup> **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. <sup>27</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> "Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (And maybe that's speaking of some of you.) <sup>29</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! [Matthew 23:25-29]**

If you go down to verse 33 He says,

<sup>33</sup> **"You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape (what?) the sentence of hell? [Matthew 23:33]**

The wages of sin is death. If you don't repent, you will spend eternity in hell paying the penalty for your sins. These Pharisees, Sadducees, these leaders were not going to escape the sentence of hell because they did not repent. So we see a stinging condemnation; even these outwardly sinful people who you think of as the dregs - the most wicked, vile sinners - they are going to enter. And notice why. And notice why. We have an explanation here, verse 32,

<sup>32</sup>**"For John came (He's explaining now) to you (that's the religious leadership; that's who he's talking to) in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the**

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**tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward** (that's our same word "repent") **so as to believe him. [Matthew 21:32]**

Jesus is revealing why these tax-gatherers and sinners are going to enter the kingdom and why these leaders would not. For John came to you in the way of righteousness; he brought forth the truth of Christ. Remember what he said in Matthew chapter 3, let's turn there briefly (Matthew chapter 3) and remind us what John shared. John came to them, they heard the message,

**Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,**<sup>2</sup> **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (*metanoeo*, change, turn!)<sup>3</sup> **For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!'"** (Your paths are not right. Your way is unrighteous; make it straight.)<sup>4</sup> **Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.**<sup>5</sup> **Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan;**<sup>6</sup> **and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they** (What?) **confessed their sins.**<sup>7</sup> **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"**<sup>8</sup> **"Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;**<sup>9</sup> **and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.**<sup>10</sup> **"And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [Matthew 3:1-10]**

Mark 1:4,

**<sup>4</sup> John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. [Mark 1:4]**

The Scripture says that the way of righteousness which John preached was that we are unrighteous; that we need to be forgiven, that we need to repent of our sins and trust in the One in whom would be coming after him that he would point to- "behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And if you don't do that, if your sins are not taken care of by Jesus Christ, your destination is eternal fire. But don't miss this. "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe..." [Matthew 21:32]. These sinners believed. They believed the truth of God that they were sinful and they deserved judgment. And they turned, and they repented of sin. And notice there's a further condemnation on these wicked leaders,

**<sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; (then look at this) and you (leaders), seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him. [Matthew 21:32]**

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“You saw these wicked sinners being saved, and you still were not turned in your heart to believe the truth that John had declared concerning your sin and the Savior.” How much worse. And some of you here have seen people truly saved. Truly turned from sin, their lives are changed, not because they made a list and started following it, but because Christ had changed their lives. And you’re living a life of disobedience, but you claim to follow Christ. I pray you’re convicted and you repent while there is still time.

Some of you have an outward religion, a veneer of righteousness. You say you follow Christ, but you don’t obey Him. We see very clearly in John, 1 John chapter 2. It’s so clear. He says,

***<sup>3</sup> And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; [1 John 2:3-4]***

Let me ask you this, have you come to know Jesus Christ? Are you fooling yourself? Does your life exhibit that, or do you go away and live a different life; a life that has no concern for the Word of God and the body Christ, has no concern for areas of sin which God has clearly said are sin. Brothers and sisters - I call you brothers and sisters -if you’re truly saved, yes, we will struggle with these things but we will have a heart that wants to do the right things, a changed heart.

I began speaking of those who name the name of Christ, yet don’t do what God says. I pray there is no one here that says “Lord, Lord, I went church, I did what you said, I believe in Jesus.” Yet your life does not reflect a true relationship with Christ. We’ve seen a story that exposes religious hypocrites, and the issue is do you obey or not? We’ve seen a stinging condemnation that they’re not going to get into heaven, although they think they are. We’ve seen an explanation that should sober you; that they had seen the truth of repentance and still didn’t respond. So I want to ask you - who are you like? Are you like the tax-gatherers and harlots that recognized their sin, responded to the message, and believed? Repented? Or are you like the religious leaders that say, “Yes, I’ll do it,” but you don’t do it. I want to finish with 1 John again one last time. Let’s turn there together, 1 John chapter 2,

***<sup>1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. <sup>3</sup> And by this (this is God’s Word, this is not my opinion) we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: [1 John 2:1-5]***

Maybe some of you were like the way I was. You came to church, you did it but on your own agenda; but you had a different life basically, even though it wasn’t outwardly visibly sinful. But you didn’t obey Christ. It’s a warning for you. It’s a warning for you. The axe is at the root of the tree. Jesus Christ died for our sins and He calls upon you to turn from your sin; to acknowledge it, to humble yourself and

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repent and believe in Jesus. And then some of us, we struggle with these things don't we? We struggle with obeying the Lord don't we? We struggle with the good fight of faith every day. I pray that this seeing this reality of what we've been saved from will encourage us to obey the Lord; that when we're tempted to disobey, we will realize the penalty for those who have not been saved is hell and we have been delivered from that. That'll motivate us to obey our gracious God who gave Himself for us, to trust Him and obey Him. Let's pray.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank You for Your Word. It's very, very clear what You meant. And I don't believe there is anyone here who doesn't at least understand that if they don't do what You say, they're not doing Your will; no matter what they say about You. Lord, I pray for anyone here whose Christian life is really a sham; who claims to know You, but yet lives a life apart from submission to You and obedience to You. I pray they would be convicted, that they would turn and repent and trust in Christ today. And Lord I pray for those of us who know You. May we be first of all so thankful that we have been delivered from our sins. We were just like the tax-gatherers and harlots; so sinful, Lord God, and You saved us in Christ. You delivered us from our sins. We are so thankful. Help us not to go back into that. Help us to turn and abstain from wickedness, Lord God, trusting You to deliver us. When we're tempted to do evil, Lord God, remind us of Your grace and mercy and help us trust You, that we would then obey. Lord, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your gracious warnings and Your love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen

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