

# Repent, and believe in him!

The late afternoon shadow of the Synagogue building had already crept across the gardens, reaching the low rock wall that formed the courtyard. On the other side of the wall was the road which led south toward Jerusalem. A man leading three camels floated past. He was probably going to load them for a caravan to Damascus. Other merchants and tradesmen were also hurrying along the road.

In the Synagogue courtyard, Jesus and some of the disciples were engaged in a debate with the elders and the chief priests.

One aging priest pointed his withered finger at Jesus: "I have heard the stories about you."

Jesus responded, "And I have asked that they not be told."

"You have spoken to the wind. Why have you done your deeds for the gentiles? Why have you taken meals with prostitutes and tax collectors? Are you not a Jew like us?" The priest's flurry of questions left him gasping for air.

Peter was getting irritated. These elders and priests were just trying to make Jesus look bad. Peter rose, his deep voice growling the words: "Jesus fed five thousand Jews a few weeks ago!"

The priest's charge reminded Jesus of the Samaritan woman at the well and the Syro-Phoenician woman who had followed him all the way to Tyre. Jesus wanted to respond directly that the gentiles seemed to believe in him, but most of the Jews were skeptical. He decided it would be better to teach with a parable.

"What do you think of this case?" Jesus began. "There was a man who had two sons..."

Jesus related the story of how the first son promised to go to work, but didn't. The second son rebelled against the father's authority and refused to go. But later the second son regretted what he had said and decided to go to the vineyard to work.



The elders pulled at their beards and reflected on the parable.

Then Jesus said: "Let me make it clear that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you."

Peter smirked at Jesus bold conclusion, glancing at the priests and elders who were glaring angrily back at the youthful Jesus before them. Jesus stabbed the air with his finger and charged on: "When John came preaching a way of holiness, you put no faith in him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did believe in him. Yet even when you saw that, you did not repent and believe in him!"



The parable provides a little mirror through which we can see our true selves. On Sunday we may be like the first son who says, "Yes Lord, I am going to follow you and serve you." But then comes Monday and we may fail to do it. At other times we may be the rebellious second son, refusing to do what we know God is calling us to do.

When we do decide to obey the commandments which the Father has given us...when we do decide to follow Jesus...when with the help of the Holy Spirit we faithfully live up to those commitments, then will our actions have met the parable's test of obedience.