

**Parable of the Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32)
 Rebuking unbelieving religious leaders**

When Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, He taught using a series of parables. In like manner, Jesus rebukes religious leaders with the first of three consecutive parables. What do you observe of the parable? How do these three parables function as a unit?

“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.’ And he answered and said, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. And the man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered and said, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even regret afterward so as to believe him. (Matt 21:28-32, LSB)

1. Carefully observe the behavior of the two sons and record your notes in a chart.

Son	Answer? Was it Honest?	Repented?	Worked?	Obedient? Why or Why Not
First				
Second				

2. What is the point of comparison? Which son described Jewish religious leaders? What was Jesus saying about them?

3. Which son represented sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes? Why will they enter the Kingdom of God? Do you remember the message of John the Baptist?

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 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!’” (Matt 3:1-3, LSB)

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Teacher Notes

When Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, He taught using a series of parables. In like manner, Jesus rebukes religious leaders with the first of three consecutive parables. What do you observe of the parable? How do these three parables function as a unit?

“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.’ And he answered and said, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. And the man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered and said, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even regret afterward so as to believe him. (Matt 21:28-32, LSB)

Inform the student: parables are often read as a single lesson from Jesus; however, some are part of a series of lessons. It's worthwhile to carefully observe if there are any parables immediately before or after the one in study to see if it is part of a series.

1. Carefully observe the behavior of the two sons and record your notes in a chart.

Teach the student how to construct a chart to help record and track the many observations one may make of a passage. This helps in comparing and contrasting what Jesus is teaching to understand the point of the parable. The table that follows is an example.

Son	Answer? Was it Honest?	Repented?	Worked?	Obedient? Why or Why Not
First	“I will not” Truthful / honest	Yes	Yes	Obedied his father. The first son regretted his answer and went to work in the vineyard as his father requested.
Second	“I will” Not truthful / dishonest	No	No religious	Disobeyed his father. The second son did not care to work in the vineyard nor obey his father and gave the answer to appease his father.

2. What is the point of comparison? Which son described Jewish religious leaders? What was Jesus saying about them?

Ask the student: how does Jesus draw your attention to the point of comparison?

Jesus’ question, “which of the two did the will of the father?” placed the point of comparison on obedience. This sets up the parable to rebuke the religious leaders. The parable is constructed in such a fashion that it is obvious which son was obedient, and Jewish religious leaders answer accordingly without realizing the admission of their offense. The lesson of the parable is hidden behind the indignation directed towards the disobedient son.

Jesus charged the religious leaders as saying yes to God, but never doing what God wanted; their “pious acts” did not grant them entrance into the kingdom of God. This response was represented by the second son whom leaders saw as disobedient!

3. Which son represented sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes? Why will they enter the Kingdom of God? Do you remember the message of John the Baptist?

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Ask the student: how were tax collectors and prostitutes viewed in Jesus' time? What was the social status of Jewish religious leaders?

Jesus' statement that "tax collectors and prostitutes" will enter the kingdom of God before Jewish religious leaders is a stinging rebuke as Jews who worked in either vocation were viewed with disdain in Jewish society. Jesus could not have chosen a more offensive comparison.

The lower classed sinners, such as tax collectors and prostitutes who once said no to God, heard the Good News, repented, changed their sinful ways and were obedient to God's will for them (Luke 7:29). These people enter the kingdom of God, and this response was represented by the first son.

The Parable of the Two Sons is linked to the verses about the question of authority (Matt 21:23-27), which established the importance of John the Baptist. John the Baptist spoke of the Good News of the kingdom of God. But Jewish religious leaders did not believe John the Baptist's message, did not repent and disobeyed God's will (Luke 7:30).

The kingdom of God is open to all who repent. True repentance is exhibited by obedience, and judging by the lives of the apostles, righteousness in the Kingdom of God can be measured in terms of obedience.

Ask the student if he would like to enter the Kingdom of God. If so, help him pray with repentance and ask Jesus into his heart for salvation.