Pentecost 19 Matthew 21:28-32
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"What Do You Think? – Test Yourself!"
I. Do you see yourself in the first son?
II. Can you see yourself in the second son?

Dear Christian friends,

It happens EVER SO OFTEN. A person is leaving church and **tells me**, "I **really** needed to hear that sermon this morning. You wrote it JUST FOR ME, didn't you?" It's NICE TO HEAR that, but I'll also make a **little confession**. I write the sermon FIRST FOR MYSELF. I need to hear this. I **need this** to HIT HOME FOR ME.

There's a real danger for BOTH me AND for you listening to the sermon. **The danger** of "I sure hope **so-and-so** is in church or **is watching** at home. THEY really need to hear this!" WAIT a minute – We don't need to hear this? That sure sounds like a PHARISEE talking!

Jesus spoke this parable to ***"the chief priests and elders of the people."*** I can easily picture Jesus LOOKING THEM STRAIGHT in the eye as He asked them, ***"What do you think?"*** Jesus addressed this parable TO **them** ABOUT **their** lives. Jesus wasn't talking **to them** ABOUT OTHER people and THEIR PROBLEMS. Jesus wanted them to TAKE THIS PERSONALLY.

"What do you think?" Jesus asks ME – you! – as we hear this parable. Or as Paul told the Corinthian Christians, ***"Test yourselves!" "What do you think – test yourself!"*** – 1)Do you see yourself in the **first** son? 2)Can you see yourself in the **second** son?

I. Do you see yourself in the first son?

"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!" Do you SEE YOURSELF in this first son? At first glance there's NOT MUCH TO LIKE about him! ***"A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.' He answered, 'I will not.'"***

This parable is about a FATHER and his **two sons**. This isn't about some MEAN, BRUTAL MASTER bossing around his **overworked, underfed slaves**. This is a father and his sons BOUND TOGETHER by blood and love - **trust** and **respect**.

This first son is a LITTLE BRAT, isn't he? He bluntly tells his father, ***"I will not.*** I don't want to go and I simply won't go." There ISN'T A HINT of love or **respect** in his voice. He doesn't even try to MAKE EXCUSES. "Not now, dad. I'm too tired – too **busy**. LATER on, OK?" He just FLAT OUT **refuses**. If you had talked this way to **your dad** what would he have done to you?

"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!" Do you SEE YOURSELF in this first son? HE KNEW exactly what his **father wanted** him to do. WE KNOW exactly what our **heavenly Father wants** us to do. ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*** Yet HOW OFTEN don't we instead tell God, "LEAVE ME **alone**. **No**, I won't put You AHEAD of myself. You're not going to tell me **how to live** my life or what I should believe."

WE KNOW exactly how our **heavenly Father wants** us to treat other people. ***"Love your neighbor as yourself."*** Yet HOW OFTEN aren't we more in love with OURSELVES than we are with our neighbor? **How often** aren't we more concerned about our OWN COMFORT and **convenience** than we are about what's best for our neighbor? I'm not thrilled about WEARING a mask but if it makes the people I'm with **more comfortable** I'LL WEAR it. **How often** isn't putting others AHEAD of ourselves a REAL STRUGGLE for us? We know what **God says**, BUT… - but my sister really annoys me – my parents don't know what they're talking about – the government is **dumb**, etc. THAT'S THE SAME as telling our heavenly Father, ***"I will not."***

"What do you think?" if we wouldn't dare talk like that to our **earthly** fathers WHY do we think we can treat our **heavenly Father** like that? **Because** WE CAN'T SEE Him do we foolishly think He **doesn't see us**?

"'I will not,' - but later he changed his mind and went." He had been wrong and he KNEW it. He HAD NO RIGHT talking to or treating his father like that. He was sorry - AND HE SHOWED it. He ***"produced fruit in keeping with repentance."*** He went AND DID what his father **had asked** him to do.

Jesus explains this first son as ***"the tax collectors and the prostitutes entering the kingdom of God."*** Thieves and hookers GOING TO HEAVEN **Jesus says** because they had TAKEN TO HEART John' the Baptist's call to **repent** and **turn away** from their sins. They had believed John's call to faith in Jesus – ***"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."***

"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!" Do you SEE YOURSELF in this first son? Thank God we do! **With His commandments** God has confronted us with our sins and called us to **repent before** it's TOO LATE. **With His gospel** God has called us to faith in Jesus as **His Son** and **our Savior**. JUST LIKE those ***"tax collectors and prostitutes"*** WE BELIEVE that Jesus has perfectly obeyed all the commandments for us. **We too believe** that Jesus' death on the cross has fully paid for all our sins. **We too believe** that TRUSTING in Jesus we have God's forgiveness of all our sins and God's promise of eternal life in heaven when we die. We **too believe** that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is God's promise and guarantee of **our own** resurrection on the Last Day. We too are ON THE ROAD to heaven – that road of repentance and **faith** in Jesus. ***"What do YOU think?"*** AMAZING, isn't it? To strengthen that faith – **for us** to be ALL THE MORE SURE of God's love and **forgiveness** and **faithfulness** – Jesus has also given us this **Holy Supper** of His true body and blood. ***"What do YOU think?"*** Don't we have **such** an AMAZING God – **such** a GRACIOUS Savior?!

Unfortunately this ISN'T THE END of the parable. There's the second son. ***"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!"***

II. Can you see yourself in the second son?

"(The father) came to the second son and said the same thing. The second son answered, 'I will go, sir.'" After his brother this guy is a breath of FRESH AIR. He's so polite and **respectful**.

"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!" Do you SEE YOURSELF in this second son? SO we should treat God. **Yes**, we love and trust God – but we should also HONOR and RESPECT Him. We are God's **dear children** but He is still our **heavenly Father**. We are BELOVED by God but we are not His BUDDIES or BOSSES. We should always show RESPECT to God but let's be careful that's NOT ALL it is – JUST SHOW. We should always talk respectfully to God but let's be careful that's NOT ALL it is – JUST TALK.

That was the problem here. ***"He answered, 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go." "What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!"*** Do you SEE YOURSELF in this second son?

Can you see yourself giving God mere LIP SERVICE? "**Yes**, Lord, I LOVE You with **all my heart**. You're NUMBER ONE in my life." But do we SHOW that by faithfully worshiping God every week? Do we actually rearrange our priorities so that God REALLY DOES COME FIRST or do we NEVER GET AROUND to doing it? Or how about this – "**Yes**, Lord, I treasure my Bible. I believe it's Your **holy, perfect** Word. You gave it to me to lead me to Jesus and to guide me through this life so I DON'T FALL for the **devil's lies** or the **world's screwed up** values." Do we SAY that but NOT FOLLOW UP on that by actually reading our Bibles **regularly**? ***"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!"***

This son was LYING TO his father. He was being a HYPOCRITE – pretending to love, **respect, obey** his father. Those are TOUGH WORDS. The TRUTH HURTS and that is the truth about this **second**

son. **Jesus says** this second son pictures the chief priests and leaders of the people. They saw NO PERSONAL NEED to repent. They **saw no personal need** of a Savior. They were GOOD – DECENT people. They were respectable – **honorable** – yes, GOD-FEARING people. They weren't like those ***"tax collectors and prostitutes."***

"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!" Do you SEE YOURSELF in this second son – LOOKING DOWN on **certain** people who don't measure up to **our standards**? Some children who **have never been** to church before are here and can't sit still during the service. Do we THANK GOD they're finally in church hearing God's Word? Do we reassure those **struggling parents** that our children weren't always angels in church either? OR do we stare that those parents for raising such **horrible, little monsters**? A visitor is in church – or someone you don't know. Do you GO introduce yourself to them – maybe help them follow along – make sure they FEEL WELCOME? **Or** do you EYE THEM UP because you're not sure they're "ONE OF US?"

The **town drunk** – a **drug addict** – that neighbor who's living with his girlfriend – now THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE who need to do some **serious repenting**! But my gossiping about that neighbor - my occasionally having **one too many** to drink – my swearing when the **Packers screw up** a play or **because the tractor** broke down while I'm trying to harvest my crops – my missing church to CATCH UP on **some sleep** or I JUST DIDN'T FEEL **like going** this week – that's NO BIG DEAL. Hey, nobody's perfect! ***"What do YOU think? Examine YOURSELF!"***

Jesus had some blunt words for these Jewish leaders who were like this second son. ***"Amen I tell you: The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John (the Baptist) came to you in the way of righteousness, but you did not believe him. However, the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him. Even when you saw this, you did not change your mind and believe him."*** EVEN AFTER they had seen and heard this they STILL DIDN'T GET it. Do you think this parable EVER HIT HOME **for them**?

Has it hit home FOR ME – for YOU? Was this just the sermon I NEEDED – YOU needed – to hear? Or are we thinking there are OTHERS who sure needed to hear this MORE than we did? ***"What do YOU think? Test YOURSELF!"*** Amen.

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