

Good morning! Please pray with me.

The title of my message is *The Kindness and Severity of God*. Please turn in your bibles to Matthew 21 and stand with me for the reading of God's word.

Matthew 21:23-32

23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. 30 And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

You may be seated.

This entire section of scripture deals with the subject of authority. It exposes the fraudulent authority of the religious leaders and upholds the authority of Christ. Not only that, but in the Parable of the Two Sons, Jesus answers the question: Who is it that actually obeys the authority of God?

Let me establish some of the immediate context. These verses describe the day after the Triumphal Entry when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a colt in fulfillment of prophecy. The people received Him shouting, **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”** (Matt 21:9) This was an event the whole city was aware of.

Immediately following the Triumphal Entry, Jesus entered the temple and cleansed it. He turned over the money changers tables and drove out those who bought and sold. Then people brought to Him the blind and the lame and He healed them.

These events, along with Him teaching in the temple are surely what the chief priests and elders meant when they demanded, **“By what authority are you doing these things?”**

To them, Jesus was an untrained, self-appointed rabbi who was not approved by the legitimate religious authorities - them! They had not granted any authority to Jesus to do any of the things he was doing. Without their approval, everything that He had done was presumptuous in their eyes.

These were important men who were used to wielding authority. They made up the ruling council of the Jews called the Sanhedrin. The fact that Jesus exercised authority that wasn't granted by them was an offense. Think about it, Jesus drove out the money changers and merchants from the temple that these men had authorized. What Jesus did by driving them out was a rebuke to these men.

Despite their antagonism toward Jesus, they could not deny that He had authority. After all, He healed the sick, He cast out demons, and He even raised people from the dead. After He forgave a paralytic's sins and healed him the crowds that saw it reacted this way in Matthew 9:8: **...they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.**

In fact, the crowds not only saw God-given authority in Jesus due to His miracles, they also saw it in His teaching. Matthew 7:28-29 says, “...**when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.**”

So, the crowds rightly understood that Jesus had great authority and that it's source was from God, but what did the religious leaders attribute Jesus' authority to? They could not have been more opposite. Terribly, they insisted Satan was the source of Jesus' power.

Earlier in Matthew 12:24, after witnessing Jesus heal a demon-oppressed man, the Pharisees said, “**It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.**”

Now, It's not certain how this dialogue would have gone had Jesus answered their question. Perhaps they hoped He would admit He had no permission from the temple authorities. Perhaps they hoped He would again claim his divinity or that his authority was from God so they could accuse Him of blasphemy.

Ultimately, their goal was to delegitimize Him before the crowd He was teaching. Jesus, knowing their insincerity, did not give them an opportunity to do that. This leads me to Lesson 1 on your bulletins.

Lesson 1: Truth is concealed from the insincere and revealed to God's people.

There are many people that seek out information about scripture - about Christ - but they seek it with the wrong motives. Perhaps they are just seeking intellectual knowledge, or perhaps (like the religious leaders) they really desire to discredit. God conceals spiritual truth from such people. That is the reason that Jesus taught in parables - so the truth would be revealed to some and obscured to others.

Spiritual understanding is a gift granted inwardly to God's people. It does not come by evidence. It does not come by debate. It does not come by indoctrination. It comes by the proclamation of God's word. As the word of God is proclaimed the

Spirit of God is at work ministering the truth of it in the hearts of those who are His.

Listen to what Jesus says about knowing His authority in John 7:16-17: **“My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17 If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.**

Did you catch that? **If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know....** God reveals truth to those who are genuine.

There are many verses that teach this, but here are just a couple more.

- John 8:47: **Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.**
- John 10:26-27: **...you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.**

The obscuring of spiritual truth is simultaneously an act of judgment and an act of mercy. It is an act of judgment, because in their unbelief God shuts off the light, imprisoning them in the darkness they desire. That is a fearful thing. It is also an act of mercy because any amount of light the insincere are exposed to will only further add to what? Their accountability.

In Matthew 13:12-13, speaking of spiritual truth, Jesus said, **“12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”**

Just as Jesus taught in parables to conceal truth from unbelievers, so too He concealed the truth from these men by not answering their question straight out. By the end of this passage, He will have provided an answer, but it will be an answer that is only discernible to those whom God grants spiritual understanding.

Look with me at verse 24 to see how Jesus responded. **24 But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: 25 The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”**

It may not seem like it at first, but that is a doozy of a question. You have to understand some things about the ministry of John the Baptist to see why.

First, John was wildly popular with the people. Matthew 3:5-6 describes the reach of his ministry: **5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.**

Second, the people believed he was a prophet. Even Herod, who desired to kill John for rebuking him concerning his brother’s wife, hesitated because he feared what the people would do if he killed their prophet.

Third, John was as severe with the religious leaders as Jesus was. When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to him, he said, **“Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance....”** (Matt 3:7) Speaking of them, he said, **“...even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”** (Matt 3:10)

Lastly, John heralded Christ’s coming. This is the entire reason for John’s ministry - to make straight the way of the Lord. He spoke of One who would come and baptize not with water, but **with the Holy Spirit and fire** (Matt 3:11). When he saw Jesus he said **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!** (John 1:29)

Now, with that in mind, picture the scene in the temple. Jesus is teaching a large crowd. These are the same people that would have trekked out to the wilderness to be baptized by John who they held to be a prophet from God. Before them all, Jesus asked these men, **“The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”**

I bet you could hear a pin drop. Imagine the immediate tension this question created.

Jesus is effectively saying, “You’re demanding answers about My authority? Let’s see what sort of religious authorities you are. Let’s see if you’re qualified to judge the authority of John’s ministry first.” He pitted their convictions against their reluctance to anger the crowd.

Do you see the predicament they are in? If they say, “From heaven”, they will have the approval of the crowd, but Jesus will be able to say to them, **“Why then did you not believe him?”** He’d be able to say, “Why didn’t you repent at John’s rebuke? Why didn’t you accept Me as the Messiah if God was behind his ministry?”

But it’s no better for them If they say, “From men.” Look at verse 26. **26 But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”** The parallel verse in Luke 20:6 actually tells us what they were afraid of. It says, **”...if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.”**

They are well and truly stuck. So what do they do? They huddle up. This must have looked ridiculous to everyone watching. It’s a simple question, isn’t it? Shouldn’t they have been able to reply without forming a committee to discuss it? So, they huddle up. “If we say this, then this... If we say that, then that... Let’s just say, ‘I don’t know.’”

They take the third option which is really the worst possible answer. These are the elders and chief priests and they don’t know if John’s ministry was from God or man? If they were unfit to judge the authority of John’s ministry, then they were also unfit to judge the authority of Jesus.

With one question Jesus destroyed any credibility these men might have had with the crowd. He also exposed their lack of authority regarding spiritual matters.

I love how Jesus responds to them. He said, **“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”** In other words, if you’re not going to be honest, I’m not obligated to give you any further truth about Me, and He turned off the light.

After that interaction, it probably would have been wise for them to leave, but Jesus isn’t finished with them yet. He won’t reveal more truth about Himself, but He is about to reveal a great deal of truth about them.

Look with me verse 28-32: **28 “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ 29 And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. 30 And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.**

Since they had refused earlier to answer a straightforward question, Jesus had to use a parable to get an honest answer from them. Their answer, though it was the correct one, condemns them out of their own mouths.

This is a very simple parable to understand. What we see are two different responses to the gospel. The father in the parable is God, of course. The vineyard is the kingdom of God. Obeying the father’s command and entering into the vineyard is belief in the gospel. It is the Father’s will that all should obey and enter into His kingdom.

There are plenty of verses that express this desire of the Father:

- Matthew 11:28 where Jesus said, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**
- 2 Corinthians 17:30 **The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent...**

- 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God **desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

I want you to notice that both sons are rebels. There are no sons in the parable that say they'll obey the father and then immediately carry it out. There is a son that openly rebels and later "changes his mind," and there is a son that says he will obey, but never actually does.

Many of the commentaries I studied made a large point about the importance of doing versus merely saying in this parable. They said what we should learn from the parable is that performance is greater than promise. Although you certainly see that in the parable, I do not believe that is the key understanding Jesus wants to leave us with. That gives the impression that in order to obey the Father's will and enter His kingdom, we must perform or work for it. That is not the case.

As Jesus interprets the parable in verse 32, He makes it clear that the key difference he's highlighting is belief and unbelief. The two sons are contrasted in this way: One son rebelled, then repented, then actually obeyed the father, and this is equated with believing the gospel. The other son declares his intention to obey, but never gets there. This is equated with remaining in unbelief.

So, don't get bogged down by seeing the son who did the father's will as the one who worked. That will actually steer you in the opposite direction of correct interpretation. Parables are not allegories where every detail in the story is meant to be meaningful. Parables are meant to convey one powerful spiritual truth. So, in this case the truth we should take away is this: It is infinitely greater to begin as an openly rebellious son who then repents and obeys the father's will than to be one who is openly obedient, but never actually obeys.

I do not believe Jesus intended to present the second son as a liar. It's not that the second son told the father, "I go, sir," all the while lying and never intending to go. Who does the second son represent? Jesus makes it clear that the second son represents the religious leaders. These are fastidious law keepers. These are people who think they are above everyone else and altogether most pleasing to God.

They say, “I go, sir,” but they don’t know the way, or, rather, the way they know is the wrong way, so they never get there. They are “going” not in obedience to the Father through belief in the gospel, but through what? Their own works.

That brings me to Lesson 2 on your bulletins.

Lesson 2: God is severe with the self-righteous.

When Jesus was rebuked by the scribes and Pharisees for enjoying a great feast with tax collectors and sinners, in Luke 5:32, He said, **“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”**

We can’t take His words literally, can we? Jesus is not saying there are truly righteous people in the world that don’t need Him. Romans 3:10: **None is righteous, no, not one....** So, if we can’t take His words literally, how are we to take them? We should understand this verse as saying **“I have not come to call [those who believe they are] righteous but sinners to repentance.”**

Self-righteousness is the sort of righteousness that God hates. Self-righteousness is the idea that we can be right with God all by ourselves. It is incredibly deceptive. It binds people in bondage to the law and blinds them to their need for a Savior. It causes them to feel obedient to the Father while disobeying His command to repent and believe the gospel.

Listen to how Paul explains Israel’s failure to find the righteousness that God requires. Romans 10:1-3: **1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.**

All of their zeal for God meant nothing since it was not according to knowledge. You can spend your entire life very zealously saying to the Father, “I go, sir,” and never arrive.

Romans 10:3 says they were **ignorant of the righteousness of God**. They did not think highly enough of the perfect holiness of God. They lacked the knowledge of the depth of righteousness God actually requires to enter His kingdom - perfection. They didn't know. They thought they could earn God's favor in their own feeble, pitiful efforts. Like the second son in the parable, they thought they were going in, but they were going the wrong way by attempting to establish their own righteousness.

You must abandon all efforts to establish your own righteousness, and submit - that's the language of Romans 10:3 - you must submit to the righteousness that comes from God through faith in His Son.

That is the only standard of righteousness that God will accept. We must receive the righteousness of Christ Himself - a perfect righteousness - or there is no entrance for us into Father's kingdom.

This flies in the face of human pride, doesn't it? Proud man wants to say, "God is pleased with me because of what I do! I earn it because I'm better than everyone else." That is what the religious leaders in Israel thought.

Why do I say that God hates self-righteousness? Because although Jesus was known for His love for people, His compassion for sinners, His forgiveness, He had none of that for the religious elite of Israel. He had the opposite. He had severity, condemnation, and judgment for them. I have to believe this was absolutely shocking to people.

Man looks at outwardly moral, religious people and thinks highly of them. In fact, that was what motivated the scribes and Pharisees. They loved having the place of honor at feasts. They loved having the best seats in the synagogue. They loved receiving greetings in the marketplace. In Matthew 23:5, Jesus rebukes them saying, "**They do all their deeds to be seen by others.**"

God is not fooled by outward appearances. He is unimpressed by good works done for show. He sees right through those things. So, while man thinks well of the outwardly obedient son that says, "I go, sir." God sees inwardly to the heart and

says, **“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me....”**
(Matthew 15:8)

Jesus reserves some of the strongest condemnation in scripture for the religious elite in Israel. The entire chapter of Matthew 23 is devoted to denouncing them in the severest possible language. Here are a few of the verses that stand out:

- Matthew 23:13 - **“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.**
- Matthew 23:27-28 - **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**
- And lastly, Matthew 23:33 - **You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?**

Now it's hard to imagine anything topping those verses, but I don't think those verses hold a candle to what Jesus says to them in our text this morning. Look at verse 31 with me again. **31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.”**

This is the ultimate mic drop moment. There can't be a more severe condemnation to these men than this. Tax-collectors and prostitutes? They enter the kingdom before we do? Can you imagine anything Jesus could have said that would be more condemning to them?

Why does self-righteousness invite this kind of severity? Simply put, it is a rejection of God's sacrifice for sin. It is a rejection of Christ Himself. God is holding out salvation to all who will receive Christ, but these men and others like them pridefully reject Him. They turn their noses up to the gospel.

God has made a way for them to be saved, but they say, “No, I’m going to make it on my own,” and they teach others to do the same. Can you imagine how offensive and insulting it is to God?

I don’t want to make it sound as if self-righteousness is a sin that God cannot overcome. God does save self-righteous people but they must first be humbled. They must come to a point where instead of looking at the law and seeing themselves as having fulfilled it, they must admit they haven’t and they can’t. They cannot be saved until they recognize their need for Jesus Christ. They must “change their mind” like the first son. They must repent of their dead works and turn in faith to Christ before they can be saved.

That is why they are at the back of the line of salvation as it were. That is why tax-collectors and harlots enter before them. It’s not to say that they are going to enter, nobody will enter in unbelief. Their self-righteousness is like iron bars on the entrance to the kingdom of God. They will never enter until they turn from their pride, humble themselves, and trust in Christ alone to save them.

At one time Paul was like the second son. He thought he was earning righteousness through outwardly keeping the law. He was very zealous for God, but it was not according to knowledge.

Listen to his testimony about what he previously had confidence in before he came to faith in Christ, and how he came to see those things after he was converted.
Philippians 3:4-9

4 ...If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ....

That is what a Christian is, friends. It is someone who has abandoned their own efforts and has put all their hope and faith in Christ to give them the righteousness God requires.

After following Christ for many years and growing accustomed to the scriptures, God's severity with the self-righteous has become familiar to me. I can read through these verses now, without much thought. The shock of it has worn off. But, do you know what hasn't become familiar? Do you know what I still find shocking all the time? The wonder of His kindness toward sinners - even sinners of the worst sort. That will always amaze me. Why is that? It's because I can see myself as the worst sort of sinner.

That brings me to Lesson 3 on your bulletins.

Lesson 3: God is kind to those who recognize their ungodliness.

This is not what you'd expect, is it? Doesn't God have wrath for ungodliness? Yes, He does. Romans 1:18 says, "**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men....**"

That's true, but He also loves it when people recognize their ungodliness. The person who admits their sinfulness comes into agreement with God about their sin.

Romans 4:5 **And to the one who does not work** [the one who is not trying to earn righteousness] **but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness....**

Romans 5:6 **For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**

Isn't it a wonderful thing that Christ died for the ungodly? That's all of us, isn't it? That's us! We are the ungodly that Christ died for if we recognize that we've

rebelled against the Father's command and, like the first son, "change our mind" and enter his kingdom by faith.

It's no mistake that Jesus chose tax collectors and prostitutes for this rebuke - they would be the ungodliest sinners in the minds of everyone listening. Tax collectors were universally despised by the Jewish people. They were Jews employed by the Romans to tax the people and fund the occupation. They were known as traitors to their people. Not only that, but they were well-known for enriching themselves by taking more than demanded by Rome. They were traitorous and oppressive thieves.

Together, tax collectors and prostitutes were the pariahs of society. The lowest of the low. They were considered completely beyond the mercy of God, but Jesus said they "**go into the kingdom of God before**" the religious elite. Why?

The worst sinners have the clearest understanding of their status with God. They do not have mountains of "good works" to take pride in. They do not have a false sense of God's delight in them. Society at large doesn't think well of them - they are despised. They go in first because they've already been humbled before a holy God. They have no illusion of self-righteousness standing in their way keeping them from "changing their mind" and embracing the Savior.

It was them - the tax collectors and the prostitutes who heard John's preaching and repented - that truly did the Father's will. They are the first sons in the parable. They are the ones that openly rebelled against the father's command, but later repented, and finally entered the vineyard. It was them, not the religious, that truly obeyed the Father.

Look at verse 32 with me: **For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.**

When Jesus says "**John came to you in the way of righteousness**" this validates a couple of things about John's ministry.

First, it validates his message. He preached a message that showed people the true way of gaining righteousness. Or, that is to say, he preached the gospel. It may have been an incomplete gospel message - but it was the gospel as it was revealed at the time. It was sufficient for people, including tax collectors and prostitutes, to look forward in faith to the coming Messiah and receive God's mercy.

Second, it validates his ministry. This is the answer to the question Jesus posed to the chief priests and elders that confronted Him. John's ministry was from heaven because it was in the way of genuine righteousness. Further, since John's ministry was ordained by God, so was Jesus' ministry since John proclaimed His coming and Messiahship.

Think about the enormous amount of light that the religious elite had been exposed to. Not only were they exposed to John's prophetic ministry and failed to believe, but they also witnessed what? They witnessed the changed lives of the people who did believe John's message. They saw the worst of sinners turn from their sin and embrace the Savior. Jesus held them double accountable.

Everyone who has listened to this sermon has been given a glimpse into the mind of God. A window has been opened. Light has been given. If you're honest, what you've heard is not what you'd naturally expect. God is different from us. His ways are not our ways. After hearing this message there are a few things you can no longer say.

To the person who believes they are righteous without Christ: It is not God's will for you to keep a list of commands to earn His favor. It is God's will for you to turn from your sins - to change your mind - and put your faith and trust in the Savior.

There is no salvation in law keeping. There is only spiritual blindness and bondage. The law was not given so that men could be saved by it, it was given so that men would be driven to Christ for salvation.

If you are trying to earn salvation through your works, you will not receive God's favor, you will receive His severity. You will receive condemnation of the strongest sort. Your self-righteousness will keep you far from the kingdom of God, and many

of the worst sinners who recognize their ungodliness will enter before you ever will. You can no longer say that God commands you to keep laws to be saved.

To the person who rejects Christianity because they think Christians are self-righteous: There is no such thing! That is an impossibility. A Christian is someone who has abandoned all reliance on their own works to be right with God and has put all their trust in the work of the Savior. A self-righteous Christian is a Christian in name only, not in reality.

Now, maybe you've encountered people who call themselves Christians that have demanded you keep a great deal of rules to be saved. Those are called legalists, and if they are trusting in their rule following for salvation, they are lost.

But, maybe that's not what has happened at all. Perhaps you've spent time around Christians and their holy lives by contrast have convicted you of your sins. That does not make them self-righteous. Don't make the same mistake as the elders and chief priests who witnessed the changed lives of tax collectors and prostitutes and still failed to believe.

If you've been convicted, to that I say, "Good!" Repent. Be like the first son who changed his mind and obeyed the Father through belief in the Son. You can no longer say that genuine Christians are self-righteous.

To the person who believes they are too great a sinner to receive God's mercy: This text in Matthew 21 ought to be cherished by you. God's mercy is so vast and far reaching that it can accept all humble, repentant sinners who cling to the Savior in hope. God will not reject you, He sent His Son to bear your sins on the cross and replace them with His own righteousness.

Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:21. This is the exchange God wants to make with you. It says, "**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**" You can no longer say God's mercy is insufficient for you.

To those who are saved: Never write someone off as a lost cause. Don't believe for a moment that they are beyond God's ability to forgive. Never cease praying for people. Never cease preaching the gospel to them. Romans 1:16 says, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes....”**

Our Lord Himself has told us that openly rebellious sinners of the worst sort enter the kingdom more easily than those who appear obedient on the outside, yet remain in unbelief. You can no longer say that anyone is too far gone to be saved.

I'll be up front after service if you have any questions or if I can pray for you in any way.

Please pray with me.