

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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The Path to Rebellion, Part 3

Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-30, “But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.”

This text is a description of certain Jews and certain Gentiles in Christ's day. Of the Jews, there were those who professed a love for God and His word and yet privately refused to obey. This is the second son in the passage I just read.

In contrast you have the Gentile, the first son, on account of their religion; they rightly were understood to be ones who lived in rebellion against God. And yet upon the preaching of the word, many of these reputed “sinners” repented and thus fulfilled the word of the Lord. Truly it was the first son who did the will of the Father!

And yet there could have been more sons mentioned here. See, on account of His audience, Christ limited this parable to only two responses to the Kingdom. Yet there could have been a third. This would be those who willingly rebel against God and, when confronted, remain in their rebellion.

Such were the people of our text this morning. 1 Samuel 8:10-18 describes a group of people, Christians, who beholding the command of God nevertheless said, “No! We want to do it our way. We don't want God as King over us. We want to live like the nations surrounding us. We want to be like the world.”

And then when they were confronted with the reality of their sin, unlike the first son in Christ's parable, they did NOT repent, but remained stiff-necked.

1 Samuel 8:19, “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.”

Sadly many a Christian has walked on this path. They behold the things that dazzle.¹ They view the

¹ Hymn #654, New Trinity Hymnal, second stanza

tempting promises of the world. And even though they know they are in sin, they don't care; the passing pleasures of rebellion have taken hold of them!

And yet they and we must know that to traverse that road leads to rebellion. There is a fee. There is a toll to be paid.

Previously we considered “The Cost” involved in traveling The Path to Rebellion. As to our pride and joy, we saw that our sinful rebellion may lead to the enslavement of our children to sin! We saw that it would involve the eternal loss of our sons and daughters!

As it pertains to our property, given as a foretaste of the Promised Land we someday will enjoy in the New Heavens and New Earth, it will potentially be lost. Now this doesn't mean that if we sin we might lose some of our money. Rather, this is saying that if we insist on our sin, the property that God has given as a foretaste of our enjoyment of the Kingdom could become the cause of weeping and not rejoicing.²

Our Prosperity

1 Samuel 8:15, “And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.”

At this time in redemptive history there was a tithe imposed on the people of God. This is typically called “a temple tax” given in the context of worship for the support of the priesthood.

Numbers 18:21, “And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

With the advent of an earthly monarchy, the cost now would be double, and then triple.³ The first ten percent would continue to be given to God in the context of worship. But now the next ten percent would be taken by the king in order to support his bureaucracy, his army, administration, and projects.

Now step back from this text for a moment; it's really quite amazing. God did not intend for His people to live as vagabonds and beggars. The Biblical standard is espoused by Paul, “if anyone will not work, neither let him eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Truly Israel was called to labor with the understanding that

- (1) All that they possessed was the Lord's, and
- (2) Yet God only required a tenth of it for Himself, and
- (3) The rest was to be used, as we have seen, unto the people's enjoyment of the Kingdom of God.

This is the purpose of worldly wealth. God, “richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

² For example consider divorce. When a Christian man or woman goes down that awful road, what was once a source of such joy in anticipation of the Promised Land, their property, usually becomes the source of war. Rather than using their property for enjoying God, the sinning couple uses their property as a means to continue the war.

³ Compare 1 Samuel 8:17

Now think with me on this one. In a primitive agricultural society, there is not a lot of extra money on a yearly basis. The costs of the seed, the costs of the tools — hoes, shovels, plows, etc. — the labor costs for planting, harvesting, transporting, and storing of the crop, did not leave a lot of extra wealth. Add to these costs the farmers own food, clothing, shelter, the caring for the needy and infirmed along with the temple tax; and the amount left was even less.⁴

There would be very little extra after paying for the necessities of life. Now enter sin and the people's stiff-necked rebellion wherein they had to have a “king like the nations” and the cost of living would increase. The little that might be left over after all the bills and obligations had been paid, the monies which usually served as a buffer between living and dying, these now would go the king! The third cost for the people’s sin would be their prosperity. The little that might be left over after all other obligations had been met was to go to the king.

Again you must see that with the first two “costs” this had covenantal repercussion. It is the plan of God not simply to get His people to heaven by “the hair of their chinny, chin, chin.” Indeed, part of the covenant, part of Kingdom living, is enjoying the prosperity that God gives us.

Genesis 32:9, “And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well⁵ [prosper] with thee.”

“Prosperity” is a major theme of the Covenant!

Deuteronomy 29:9, “Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.”

Moses told the people of who were about to enter the Promised Land that keeping the words of the covenant would result in prosperity.

What is meant by “prosperity” when we speak of God's Kingdom?

Are we talking about the “health and wealth” gospel so prevalent in our day?

All covenant prosperity is realized when we enjoy a depth in our walks with God, that is what prosperity is all about.

Proverbs 28:13, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

The parallel expression for “prosper” in this text is “to find compassion.” Truly in the Kingdom of God, prosperity references the existential and spiritual results of a healthy walk with God!

3 John 2-3, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth

⁴ In a primitive agrarian society the wealth multiplier was generally one to one, compared to the nine to one ratio that we experience today.

⁵ טוב יatab

that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.”

Once again notice how John used the term, “prosper.” It is used in a context that is parallel with having the health that would be needed to serve God freely and “walking in the truth.” Truly when a child of God walks (which connotes an intimate experiencing of someone or something) in the truth, he is said to be prospering!

In light of this I hope you see that to “prosper” in the Kingdom is not to have a lot of money (how ludicrous); rather it is to know joy, the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, the truth, and a walk with God which is intimate and has depth. It is a deep and abiding fellowship unhindered by the things of this life.

That is what the “extra” (whether that be time, money, resources, etc.) which an Israelite had was all about. Whatever was “left over” (after their tithe and their living costs) was given NOT so that the people might do their own thing. Rather, they were given so that they might have the means to invest in and so enjoy the Kingdom of God. It was to take hold of that which is life indeed.⁶ This is what prosperity is all about for the Christian!

Well from this text we see the cost of one's sin: it may require from us our prosperity.

David, though the King of Israel (which at the time was one of the most powerful nations in the region), nevertheless following his sin with Bathsheba, reaped this:

Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.”

Psalm 51:8, “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.”

Psalm 51:11-12, “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

From the Biblical perspective we would say that David's sin cost him his prosperity! Though he remained wealthy and maintained his power, nevertheless, the joy of life was gone. He no longer knew the peace of God. It seemed as though his prayers bounced off the ceiling!

Consider the exhortation of James to Christians entangled in sin.

James 4:9, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.”

James' prayer was for them to NOT know prosperity, BUT to be miserable, to mourn, and to weep!

Is it any surprise to read of Paul's description of the rebellious Christian of his day?

1 Timothy 5:6, “But she that liveth [gives herself to wanton] in pleasure is dead while she

⁶ Compare 1 Timothy 6:19

liveth.”

Family of God, behold the very serious cost that may be assessed if you continue in your sin. Your joy will turn into sorrow. Your laughter will be turned into weeping. You will have all that your sinful heart desires, but you will be a shell of a man or woman.

This is another toll which may be assessed if you travel the road to rebellion. And yet there is more.

Productivity

1 Samuel 8:16, “And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men⁷, and your asses, and put them to his work.”

Most of the slavery referenced in the Bible was quite unlike the caricature of antebellum slavery. The average person’s concept of slavery is that of oppression and suppression. In this concept of slavery the slave is not viewed as a person, had very little if any rights, and was not allowed to be educated. This type of slave is generally thought to be of a particular genetic background, and was at the disposal of their master to do with them what was desired.⁸

This is not the slavery mentioned in Scripture. Slavery mentioned in the Bible was more akin to an employer/employee relationship of today. The slave could be educated, and in many cases they were better educated than their owner. They had legal rights. They were not at the master’s disposal to do as they wanted. They were paid a wage. They could purchase their freedom if they were able. In fact on the socio-economic ladder in Israel, the slave was above the day laborer which populated the countryside.

In light of this, slavery is not condemned in Scripture. In fact, notice that a slave if he so desired, could choose to remain a slave.

Exodus 21:5, “And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.”

Why would you choose to remain in such an oppressive system?

That’s the point; it wasn’t oppressive. Again, many a slave was better off than the poor working class of Israel. Accordingly, God made allowance for the slave who wanted to stay a slave on account of love.

In fact far from being an oppressive system, you must see that the slavery or the employee/employer

⁷ The NIV and RSV render this cattle rather than young men. בַּחֹרֶר *bachuwr* The LXX has *boukolia*, “cattle.” In support of the LXX it has been suggested that “cattle” is the better rendering because (1) “young men” was already referenced in v. 11, (2) the LXX obviously was translated from a text which had the word for “cattle” in the Hebrew (the word for “cattle” [*baqar*] and “young men” [*bahur*] in the Hebrew is very close, the difference could easily be accounted to a copyist’s error), and (3) Weinfeld references the fact that in some near eastern documents of release and exemption the royal workforce is represented by the triad slaves, oxen, and asses- which matches the LXX here (for this see Robert Gordon’s commentary on *I & II Samuel*, p. 111).

⁸ For a more accurate view of antebellum slavery, read *For Defense of Virginia and the South*, R. L. Dabney.

relationship of Palestine was an essential part of the productivity of Israel. Through this means people made their living (the owner). Other people were enabled to survive (the slave). And products flowed freely in Israel because of the work.

And yet not everyone could afford a slave. Ah, but many had animals, specifically an ox/cattle or a donkey by which they were enabled to perform their work or trade.

If you lived in Bible times why would you own an ox or a donkey?

You wouldn't own these animals because you wanted a pet. Rather, you owned them because they were needed for you to be productive and so make a living.

From all of this I hope you see that whether it be slaves, cattle, or donkeys, each of these, held value in their ability to help a person make a living. They represented that which constituted a person's productivity, their well-being, their ability to survive in this state of sin and misery. And thus, when Samuel turned his focus to the slave, cattle, or donkey, he was referencing that which was synonymous with the people's productivity.

Robert Bergen said of this verse, "...[the king here would take] the engines of field labor and commerce."⁹ Walter Brueggemann put it this way: "The king will cut into Israel's labor and means of production..."¹⁰

The fourth cost associated with the people's sin was the loss of productivity.

1 Samuel 8:16, "And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and **put them to his work.**"

One cannot miss the last three words here, "for his work." It is not that the King would take the people's servants or animals for himself (like he would their children). Rather, he simply would reassign them such that they would do HIS work.

This is another cost associated with our sin, the loss of our productivity. And yet today most of us do not have employees, cattle, or donkeys with which to do our work. So what constitutes our Productivity, our ability to co-reign with Christ over creation?

First it would certainly include some of our material possessions- like our cars, tools, phones, laptops, and houses. And we could also lump into this, things like our health, skills and abilities. All these things have been given to us by God so that we might be able to serve in His Kingdom.

Well brothers and sisters, if we choose to walk the path to rebellion, these things may be forfeited!

You say: Come on, show me examples of a Christian who, because of his sin, lost his car, laptop, or other tool of productivity.

Aside from the one or two examples which I could offer, I cannot make the case that your sin will result in the forfeiture of, say, your laptop. And yet don't misunderstand; that is not the point. The text

⁹ Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC, page 118

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, page 64

is NOT teaching that if we sin we might lose these things. Again, the King wouldn't take the people's slaves, cattle, or donkeys; rather he simply would use them for his purpose.

The teaching here is not that the people would lose their slaves, oxen, or donkeys. It is teaching that they will lose their productivity! And of this we can demonstrate the reality today.

The Curse

After Adam and Eve sinned against God, they had a cost that was levied against them. Eve would be cursed in the home. Her child-bearing now would be painful. And marriage would become a war.

Likewise Adam, and so also all mankind, was cursed.

Genesis 3:17-19, "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

From this we conclude that on account of sin the earth now will not readily yield its fruit. Our work is cursed brothers and sisters, our productivity!

Now get this. There is a relativity built into the curse of Adam. Not all labors are equally cursed. Sometimes with minimal effort, we reap maximum rewards. Other times with great effort, we reap little. And all of this is based upon the good pleasure of our kind and gracious Lord, His grace and mercy.

Accordingly now behold the cost of your sin. If we choose to traverse the Highway to Sin, God may and has in times past lifted His grace such that we reap more thorns, thistles, sweat than usual. Now again, God does not do this by way of punishment, but discipline, because He loves us! In response to His people's adulterous passion to worship the baals, God said this:

Hosea 2:6-7, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now."

So do not be surprised if in your sinning, you find that you are reaping more tares than usual. Don't be surprised that things just aren't falling into place like they did in times past. Indeed, you are reaping the consequences of your sin.

In light of this, "How ought we to respond to this sermon/text?"

Let us first respond with gratitude for the ever thickening hedge of grief and pain that God erects in our paths to keep us from our lovers. I've quoted this before; Rutherford put it this way:

"The world, and the things of the world, is the lover you naturally desire besides your own husband Christ. The hedge of thorns and the wall which God builds in your way, to hinder you

from this lover, is the thorny hedge of daily grief, loss of children, weakness of body, iniquity of the time, uncertainty of estate, lack of worldly comfort... What do you lose, if God twists and makes the hedge even thicker? God be blessed, the Lord will not let you find your paths.”¹¹

But then let us heed the warning! Generally speaking every time we labor by the sweat of the brow, we behold the consequences of sin, consequences which could be far greater if the Lord so deigned. Lack joy, peace, a sense of fulfillment in our walks (not necessarily on account of a specific sin, but just because the day is evil), we behold the consequences of sin, consequences which could be far greater if the Lord so deigned.

In other words, in and through all things as we behold the misery of this life, let us ever and always know that such and much more could be the cost if we indulge in sin.

So is the pleasure of sin worth it?

Lastly, let us respond with prayer/dependence upon Christ and His cross work.

This past week we observed the fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001. As I thought about that day on Monday, one of many impulses came back to my mind. Specifically the gratitude I had for my family and the fact that they were safe by my side as we watched in horror the collapse of the two towers.

What is it about tragedy that makes us cling to the ones we love?

Whatever it may be, allow the glimpse we have seen this past couple of weeks regarding the Cost of Sin to make you cling to Christ, your Beloved, all the more! Praise God for His forgiveness. Praise God for His goodness. Praise God that no matter how much I have failed him and how much of the bitterness of sin I have reaped, the Lord is ever and always willing to receive us as the father did the prodigal!

¹¹ Samuel Rutherford, *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, page 41

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About the Preacher

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