

# Story 3: Three Views of Good and Evil

This Bible study focuses on passages from the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament.

Stories that Make You Think:

## **The Sons, Matthew 21:28-32**

## **The Builders, Matthew 7:24-27**

## **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18:9-14**

### **Objective:**

To understand that God judges us by what we do, not what we know or what we promise to do; to understand that the only way we can be made right with God is by trusting in his mercy, not in our achievements.

### **Introductory Question:**

We are going to read three short stories that Jesus told in our discussion today. One of the stories is about a father asking his two sons to help him work in the field. Begin by sharing experiences from childhood. When you were a child, did your parents assign you chores (tasks) to do to help around the house or add to the family income?

### **Introduction:**

Jesus taught that there is a choice between two paths in life - a wide gate and an easy road that leads directly to hell (eternal punishment and separation from God), or a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life forever with God (**Matthew 7:13-14**). In the three short stories that we are going to read tonight, Jesus talks about choices between two alternatives - a way that is right and pleasing to God and a way that is not. As we read and discuss the three stories, look for elements that are common to all three.

### **Reading the Passages:**

Have the group read each story silently before you discuss it. Then have one group member retell the story in his own words.

## **Matthew 21:28-32 - The Sons**

This is the story about the father and his two sons. Jesus compares one of the two sons to the religious leaders of his time and the other to sinners and tax collectors. The religious leaders were diligent students of God's laws as they had been given to the Jews two

thousand years earlier. However, they rejected Jesus' authority as a teacher. The tax collectors that Jesus mentions in his commentary on the story were despised outcasts. Tax collectors in Roman-ruled Palestine were opportunists and collaborators with the Romans and were classified with the lowest of sinners by their fellow Jews.

In his commentary Jesus also mentions a man called John the Baptist. John was a preacher who preceded Jesus who called on people to turn away from their sins and turn to God.

1. Describe the two sons in the story - what are they like?
2. What are the contrasts in this story?
3. What is the main point Jesus is trying to make?
4. What kinds of people needed to hear this story?
5. How do you think the religious leaders might have responded to this story?
6. How do you think Jesus would like us to respond?

### **Matthew 7:24-27 - The Builders**

1. Jesus tells about building two houses. What are the similarities between the two homes that are built? the differences?
2. What makes the differences evident?
3. Jesus compares our lives to building a house. He describes two ways of living. Look carefully at Jesus' comparison. How are the two ways of living alike?
4. What is the difference?
5. Jesus implies that the storms of life will make it evident whether a person's life is built upon a strong foundation. What do you think are the storms of life?
6. What does it mean for a life to come crashing to the ground? for a life to stand firm on a solid foundation?
7. What would you say is the main point Jesus was making?
8. What kind of person needs to hear this story the most?

## **Luke 18:9-14 - The Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

This story contrasts a Pharisee and a tax collector. Pharisees were strict students and keepers of the many rules included in Jewish law and traditions. They had a very legalistic view of a person's relationship with God; that is, they believed a person pleases God by strict adherence to a complicated and detailed set of rules on how to live.

1. What is the Pharisee in the story like?
2. How does he feel about himself?
3. What is his view of God?
4. How does he think God feels about him?
5. What is the Pharisee's opinion of the tax collector?
6. What is the tax collector like?
7. How does he feel about himself?
8. What is his view of God?
9. Jesus says that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, is the one who was made right, or judged as righteous by God, when their prayers were completed. What makes a person right with God, according to Jesus?
10. Why do you think God preferred the tax collector's prayer?
11. Why do you think Jesus told this story?
12. What type of person needs to hear it?
13. How does Jesus want you and me to live?

### **Thought Questions:**

1. What do these stories have in common?
2. According to Jesus, what are the characteristics of a life that pleases God?
3. How do you react to what Jesus has said?

4. Is there any thing he says you disagree with?

5. How will you put what he talks about into practice?

**Closing:**

Close with a prayer asking for God's forgiveness for our sins and requesting the courage and faith to put what Jesus teaches into practice in our lives.