

Theme: WORDS AND ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

- I. The actions of the sons spoke louder than their words
- II. The actions of the self-righteous speak louder than their words
- III. Jesus' words and actions speak volumes to this day
- IV. The words and actions of the humbled Church speak Jesus' words to proud and wounded hearts

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28, EHV).

“What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘My son, go work in the vineyard today.’

29 “He answered, ‘I don’t want to,’ but later he changed his mind and went. 30 Then the man went to the other and said the same thing. ‘I will, sir,’ he answered, but he didn’t go.

31 Which of the two did his father’s will?”

They said, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn’t believe him. Tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; but you, when you saw it, didn’t even change your minds then and believe him. (CSB 2017)

Sons of God,

A Chinese trader frequently visited a barbaric tribe of Taiwan natives. Barbaric because their warriors practiced headhunting as a rite of passage. They claimed their gods demanded it. One one occasion, the Chinese merchant pleaded with the tribal chieftain to stop the practice. “It’s immoral, God in heaven disapproves, and your tribe will only benefit from increased trade with neighboring tribes,” he said. On that particular day, his words didn’t get through. The chieftain adopted a harsh tone, so he backed off. Back in his tent, the trader thought all night about how to stop the senseless brutality.

The next day, the trader requested an audience with the chief. “God gave me a vision last night,” he said. “Heaven told me that by this time tomorrow a figure in a red cloak will visit you. Your people are to cut off his head, but that must be the last time you hunt heads.” The chief agreed that, if the dream came true, heaven itself was giving a sign.

The next day tribal warriors found a man in a red cloak. At the chief’s order, they took his head. But when the chief saw the remains up close, he wept. There, separated at the neck, lay the body of his friend the Chinese merchant. From that day on, the chief ordered his tribe never to hunt heads again. The words of this Chinese trader hit their mark. His words, reinforced by drastic action, spoke volumes.

Hopefully that story reminds us of the Savior, who gave his life for a purpose. Jesus’ words and actions may or may not have stopped us from meaningless murder. Jesus’ words still speak to us today. Jesus didn’t just say words, though. He lived them. He reinforced his words with actions. WORDS AND ACTIONS together SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS alone.

Jesus opens his parable with an invitation. “What do you think?” He wants us to think about what he says, not jump to a conclusion and move on. Take his parable—an earthly story with a heavenly meaning—to heart.

The story is simple. A man approaches each of his two sons. *He goes* to them because *he loves* them. A dutiful son who grows up on the farm knows he needs to pitch in. Rather than shame the boys for

what they *should* do, the father draws near. “**My son,**” he says to each one, my child, my boy. He calls them dear members of the family. Only then does he lay out his expectations. His ACTIONS SPEAK as LOUD as his WORDS. His words speak clearly. “**Go work in the vineyard today.**”

The sons react in equal and opposite directions. The first insists, “**I don’t want to,**” showing blatant disrespect for dad. Like any kid who sasses back to mom or dad, his words shout his opinion about his father. The second son may have been listening, though, because he puts miles between himself and his brother. He literally says, “Me, sir.” Respectful to his father, but emphatically emphasizing his own ego. “Me, me, me.” Dad, I’m not like that good-for-nothing brother of mine. **I will** do it, **sir**.

Then comes the first twist. The first son “**changed his mind and went**” later. Not necessarily a complete 180; he changed his mind, maybe not his heart. His time would be better spent in the vineyard; then he could eat the fruit of his labor. His ACTIONS SPOKE LOUDER THAN his WORDS. The second son, however, “**didn’t go.**” ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS. He didn’t really care about helping dad; he cared about his image.

Then Jesus asks his audience—and us—to weigh in. “**Which of the two did his father’s will?**” Obviously, only one of the sons did what his father asked. The people Jesus spoke to—the chief priests and elders of the people—knew the first son worked. ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS.

Then comes the second twist. Jesus’ parable attacks his audience. He took them on the journey so they could be the jury. They spoke the verdict. Judge Jesus pronounces the sentence. His WORD SPEAKS as loudly as any ACTIONS: “**Truly I tell you,**” he says. Listen up because you need to hear what comes next. “**Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.**” Nothing could be more outrageous. It’s like saying drug dealers and people who manipulate welfare will get into heaven before the good, upstanding churchgoers.

But there never were “good” churchgoers, pastors included. Every time we cut you down with words, we preach it to ourselves first. Church isn’t a society for the self-righteous, but a sickbed for sinners. We don’t come to boast about how willing we were to do God’s will this week. We were willing, but ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS. The second son prided himself in being good as a warning to us. He knew how to talk sweet and make the old man proud. It was just talk. His initial insistence *he* would work became a slap in the face when he didn’t. If we claim we are doing what God says, we fall into the same self-righteousness snare as the second son.

The first son wasn’t much better. He defied dad. But he thought better of it. He went to work. We want to work, too. We want to do our Father’s will. But we come back, week in, week out, with an impassioned plea for our Father. Week in, week out, we admit our ACTIONS SPOKE LOUDER. We haven’t met God’s demands. Week in, week out, we cry out in desperation, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Each week we wish we could have done it differently. Each week we want to get better. But time and time again we come back to admit we need more help, rescue! Each week, our Father approaches us with the word of his love. It speaks volumes to this day. Each week he sends us out to work in his vineyard, only to find us right back where we started last week. His WORD SPEAKS LOUDLY to break our hearts and prove our ACTIONS haven’t been enough. Once God, the Judge of all, convicts us, he SPEAKS another word to us, one accompanied by his own ACTIONS.

In the children’s story, “Horton Hatches an Egg”, the title character Horton, an elephant, is tasked with hatching an egg. As ridiculous as that sounds, he takes his responsibility very faithfully. Sitting in a tree on an egg, various creatures come by and mock him, but made promise. The story’s refrain clearly states his intent: “I meant what I said and I said what I meant. An elephant’s faithful one-hundred percent.” Horton knew his words spoke, but words accompanied by action speak louder. With that same vigor our Savior took his own words very seriously. When Jesus speaks, it’s as good as action; he does what he says. And he told us what he did for us. Jesus’ WORDS AND ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN all WORDS the world has ever seen. He didn’t endure persecution for hatching an egg or

undertaking a silly task, but for proclaiming the Word of God. He meant what he said, so he didn't back down. He told sinners they were wrong. More than just words, he took action.

Jesus' words spoke volumes to his opponents, the Jewish authorities. His incendiary remarks riled them up. Not long after he spoke this parable, they made arrangements to put him to death. Jesus' words spoke to them, but they didn't take them to heart. At least, not yet. But what about us? It wasn't "those people" who killed Jesus. He's God. His WORD is as good as ACTION. All he had to do was say the word to end his suffering. He didn't have to suffer their spite. He had to suffer because he means what he says. He promised to save the world. His WORD is as good as ACTION, so he took action. The Son of God allowed himself to be arrested, placed on trial with his opponents for the jury. His silence before his accusers and the judge spoke volumes. He permitted soldiers to pierce his hands and feet. His WORDS from the cross SPEAK to us today. "Father, forgive them!" His WORDS AND ACTIONS save us from our sins. He took our self-righteous thoughts and petty comparisons. With word and action, Jesus spoke to you and to me. With his Word in action, he still speaks to our hearts today. Believe his words, words reinforced by actions, and enter the kingdom of God. Your salvation is secure. In Word and action the Son of God, our Savior, won heaven for us!

Jesus doesn't leave the leaders of the people without any hope, either. He told them "**tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God *before* you.**" The door was still open. They still had time to change their minds. Jesus called them back to another faithful preacher who with Word and action said the same thing.

John the Baptist came "**in the way of righteousness.**" He preached God's Word to God's people *and* took it seriously. The content of his speech and the conduct of his life showed he was an upright man. His actions reinforced the word he proclaimed: "Repent!" Change, turn around. Re-align your heart to God's desires and amend your sinful ways. John did, not just in words. He preached the Word to anyone listening. The lowest people in society like thieves and prostitutes had a change of heart. Good-for-nothing sinners changed their ways; another testimony John spoke the truth—from God. The Jewish leaders noticed the results of John's preaching, but didn't believe him. Not so much as regret for their own sins, just despising John for speaking to "those people."

Learn from them. We come here each week because we know we are sinners. We aren't good, but God is! The same God who calls you by his powerful Word to change your mind *and* your actions. He tells you to work in his vineyard. Reach out to the lost and lonely with the loving Word of the Savior whose words and actions save us!

Consider Leah. A fake name, but a true story. Leah didn't grow up hearing about Jesus. One day a Christian friend invited her to study Jesus' Word. At the time, Leah's boyfriend opposed it. She stopped coming. She had other priorities, like her boyfriend, who beat her. In time, she got pregnant, had an abortion. After she broke off from an abusive relationship, her Christian friend invited Leah back into her home. Leah came back to Bible study. She came every week. She started going to church. In 2013, God's WORDS AND ACTIONS SPOKE over Leah, as he put his name over her: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. She began to cherish Jesus' forgiveness. To this day, Leah still works to get Jesus' Word into the lives of more and more people because she understands. Jesus' words and actions save.

Why talk about someone like Leah? God is serious about his Word. HIS WORD takes ACTION. It does what he says. When we proclaim God's Word, it does what he says. What has the world done in thousands of years to make this planet better? God in his Word makes sinners righteous. Jesus' took God's Word so seriously he gave his life to put an end to sin. So we come, week in, week out, to say we're sorry sinners. We come, week in, week out to hear the Word of God that does what it says: forgives us. And week in, week out, we use our words and actions to tell other sinners there is still time. It's not too late! May our words and actions point others to Jesus, whose WORDS AND ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN all the WORDS in the world. Amen.

"Go work in the vineyard today" (Mt 21:28, CSB). Amen