

Broken Promises. I wonder how many songs, poems, movies, and other works of art have been based on promises that were made but later broken? For example, have you ever noticed just how many Country music songs revolve around broken promises? Willie Nelson once sang a song that went by that very name “Broken Promises”. In 2008 Mark Chesnutt did a remake of a Waylon Jennings song called “Broken Promise Land.” By the way, have you heard what happens when you play a country music song backwards? You get your job back, your husband or wife back, your house back, your pick-up back, and your dog back, too.

Anyway, we all know that broken promises are no laughing matter. They hurt. Most especially when they involve us or someone we know and love. The Bible too is full of instances where people have broken their promises. How many times did the Old Testament Israelites promise, “All God says, we will do”? ‘We will worship the LORD and Him alone.’ But then just a short time later they are found worshipping the Golden Calf, Baal, Molech, or some other pagan god? In Jeremiah chapter 11 verse 13 you can sense the utter exasperation God had with His people breaking their promises when He says, “You, Judah, have as many gods as you have towns; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful

god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem”! Ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in Eden, breaking promises is what people seem to do best.

Today’s Gospel reading talks about broken promises. The temple authorities made promises to follow the laws of Moses. Yet, when the very fulfillment of those laws stands there right in front of them, in the person of Jesus, they refuse to listen. Jesus wanted to take them deep into Holy Scripture, but they would have none of it. They had their own agenda and they were blind to the truth that stood before them.

When Jesus entered the temple that day, 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?” Now, as the temple authorities, they were responsible for the teaching that happened in the temple area. They had the right to ask Jesus this question.

Jesus responds with a question of His own. Basically, He offers them a sample of His teaching method. Jesus answered them, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from

men?" In a very skillful way Jesus is letting them know, "My authority and John's authority come from the exact same place."

It's at this point in the reading that we learn the true agenda of these temple authorities. They don't really care about the truth. Their discussion amongst themselves is all about their image and standing in the eyes of the people. So, they talk the situation over and say to one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

So, they answer Jesus, "We do not know." Now here is a true broken promise. Instead of following the laws of Moses and honoring the truth, these temple authorities honor their **own** agenda. Their God is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but their own agenda is their god.

Since they were unable to answer Jesus' question, there was no reason for Jesus to answer them. Instead, He told a parable, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning to illustrate the hardness of their hearts.

The story of the first son in the parable from today's Gospel is a lot like the story of the Christian life. At first, we all say "no" to God. We are all full of that rebellion against God's will. Our sinful nature delights in what it **thinks** is freedom. We convince ourselves that we should be able to do whatever we want and not worry about the consequences. And what's more, we shouldn't have to do anything we don't feel like doing.

Then God brings His Law to bear. He may bring it to us through our parents, our friends, or even on a rare occasion, a total stranger to point out where we are wrong. Eventually, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ makes its way into the heart. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we begin to have second thoughts. God's Law informs us - convicts us - of our wrong. Then, the sweet, comforting Gospel eventually brings the word "yes" from our hearts to our lips. We realize that God's plan of forgiveness for our sins and giving us direction to live our life under His plan, is what freedom is all about! We become like that first child in the parable who said, "No way!" but then wound up keeping his father's will.

The temple authorities were like the second son. His sin is a little more sophisticated. He has learned to lie convincingly and break promises. I'm sure that all of us know people who will make any promise just to get us out of their hair. We hear phrases such as "Sure thing." "Gotcha covered." "You bet." These people are pleasant enough and they seem very sincere. You will hear them say, "Yes, I'll come over and help you tomorrow with that big project," but then the next day comes and goes and they're nowhere to be found.

When Jesus told that parable in today's Gospel, His immediate audience were those temple leaders who challenged His authority, but He speaks to us here today as well. The war that began in us on the day that the Holy Spirit planted faith in our hearts continues. And a day doesn't go by that we do not play the part of both sons. Remember, it's never just "those other people" who are guilty of sin. It's you and me, too. At times we scream "No!" in God's face until He draws us to Himself through the words of the Gospel and He gives us the ability to say, "Yes." Other times we say, "Yes!" with our lips, but our hearts are far from God and we break a promise. These "two children" will live in each of us until the day we die. They are products of the sinful nature that our parents give us at conception which was passed on to them all the way back to Adam and Eve. These "two children" battle against the holy nature God gave us when the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts. These two natures will battle within us until the day we die. (That sounds hopeless!)

Fortunately, there is a **third** son. He is not in the parable. Instead, He is the one who first told it. This Son said, "Yes Sir!" to His Father and then obeyed Him perfectly. His Father said, "You need to be human." The Son said, "Yes Sir!" and was born of the Virgin Mary.

The Father said, "You need to humble yourself under the law." The Son said, "Yes sir!" and lived a life that was perfectly free from sin.

The Father said, "You need to exchange your perfection for the sin of the world." The Son said, "Yes sir!" and John the Baptizer baptized Him.

The Father said, "Now, carry that sin to the cross." The Son said, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

The Father said, "Now, take that sin to the grave." The Son said, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit!" And having said this He breathed His last.

The Father said, "Now, proclaim your victory to the world." Then Jesus rose from the dead and He said to His disciples, "'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'" (Luke 24: 44-47)

Your sin is now gone. Jesus Christ, God's Son, in perfect obedience to His Father has taken it away. It is left behind in the grave. It will forever remain dead and buried. But you and I, on the other hand, will one day rise from the

dead just as Jesus, rose and lives with our Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit forever. We know this because even though God's name does come up in a country music song from time to time, God ***never*** breaks a promise. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful- for He cannot deny Himself", 2 Timothy 2:13. What that verse means is this: God ***never*** breaks a promise. He never has and never will! Just read about it in His Word! His promises are good and His promises are for you! Amen