

Matthew 21:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Analysis

For John came unto you in the way of righteousness—ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης (en hodō dikaiosynēs) means John's life and message perfectly aligned with God's righteous requirements. He preached and modeled repentance. **And ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him**—devastating indictment. Society's moral outcasts recognized truth the religious elite rejected.

And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward—even witnessing transformed lives didn't soften their hearts. The leaders' problem wasn't intellectual but volitional: they refused to repent because it would cost their status, power, and self-righteousness. Pride proved a greater barrier than immorality.

Historical Context

Tax collectors collaborated with Rome, extorting fellow Jews—religious and national traitors. Prostitutes violated both sexual morality and ceremonial purity. Yet these 'sinners' flocked to John's baptism (Matt 3:5-6, Luke 7:29-30), while religious leaders stood aloof. The kingdom inverts human hierarchies.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What would it cost you to truly repent—what status, reputation, or comfort might you lose?
2. How does the inclusion of 'publicans and harlots' in God's kingdom challenge your assumptions about who is 'savable'?

Interlinear Text

ἦλθεν γὰρ πρὸς ὑμᾶς Ἰωάννης ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης

came For unto you John in the way of righteousness

G2064 G1063 G4314 G5209 G2491 G1722 G3598 G1343

καὶ οὐ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ οἱ δὲ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ

and not believed him and the publicans and G3588

G2532 G3756 G4100 G846 G1161 G5057 G2532 G3588

πόρναι πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ ὑμεῖς δὲ ιδόντες οὐ

the harlots believed him ye and when ye had seen not

G4204 G4100 G846 G5210 G1161 G1492 G3756

μετεμελήθητε ὕστερον τοῦ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ

it repented afterward believed him

G3338 G5305 G4100 G846

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 21:25 (Faith): The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

2 Peter 2:21 (Righteousness): For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

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