

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	G3588	and	the publicans	and G3588
G2532	G3756	G4100	G846	G1161	G5057	G2532	
πόρναι	πιστεῦσαι	αὐτῷ	ὑμεῖς	δὲ	ἰδόντες	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	G3588	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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