

I Will Not

November 10, 2019

Matthew 21:28-32

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. 30 The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him (NRSV).

Personally my favorite parts of the Bible are the teachings of Jesus. He gives real life lessons (parables) that are based on realistic scenarios that are related to real life situations, experiences, and encounters that people can easily relate to. These lessons remain relevant today because even though the people and places change, human nature does not change.

The problem that Jesus faced is one where people typically fall into the trappings of power and authority. As individuals or groups gain more power and authority it can lead to corruption, abuse, and oppression. The trappings of power and authority took hold of the religious establishment. Only one person can fix it. Only one has the divine power and authority. The Son of God.

In Matthew chapter 21 Jesus makes the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He clears out the temple from those that are buying and selling. This is one aspect of the abuse of power and authority of the religious leaders. They violated God's temple, put a priority on money, took advantage of pilgrims, and oppressed the poor. What Jesus does is he defends the integrity of God's temple. He says "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers" (Mat 21:13). So, Jesus stands up to religious establishment and defends God's honor. This creates problems for Jesus. The chief priests and elders challenge the authority of Jesus saying "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Mat 21:23). We know the answer is God. Jesus has divine power and authority. However, Jesus does not answer. If he did that would lead to an argument, a direct confrontation, and a rejection of his claim. What he does is educate. He directs their attention to John the Baptist. "Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" (Mat 21:25). Jesus goes to the very basic premise of divine authority which is what they are challenging. They cannot answer Jesus because they obviously do not understand divine nature. Since they do not understand this, Jesus does not answer them. Instead, he uses three parables that deal with their disobedience and are directly addressed to the chief priests and elders.

This brings us to our Scripture which shows contrasting attitudes. Jesus uses a hypothetical situation that is realistic and the audience can relate to. He presents parables that deal with their response to John the Baptist. Remember, John's call of baptism of is a call of repentance. The chief priests and elders reject John's message and fail to repent. I believe the main reason is because they fell into the trappings of power and authority. It is common throughout history and today. It is common in the political realm with politicians. It is common in the financial realm with corporate executives. It is demonstrated by signs of corruption, abuse, and oppression. My perspective is that the chief priests and elders are not bad people. They are unable to understand the psychological and social dynamics of their positions. Notice Jesus

response. He treats them with care. He educates them & everyone else, including us. Jesus response is not hostile. His response is brilliant and caring.

Today's Scripture is Jesus response; the 1st of three parables. A man has two sons and he tells them to get to work, earn your keep, and help me out. The first son says "no way José, I ain't gonna do it," but then changes his mind and goes to help out his papa. The second son says "Sure thing pops, you can count on me" but is a no show. He says the right thing but does not respond with action.

The lesson from Jesus is on .pleasing God. The overall objective is pleasing God. That is what Jesus is doing and that is what the chief priests and elders are supposed to be doing. Which one pleases God the most? The father in the parable represents God. the first son represents the tax collectors and prostitutes. They were bad, they violated God's law but they repented. They answered John's call of repentance. The second represents the chief priests and the elders. They say the right things, tell you what you want to hear, but fail to do the will of God. They were worse. They rejected John's call to repentance and continue to disobey God. That is the problem. Of all the people on the earth they are the ones that should be obedient to God. So, the religious leaders will fare worse in judgment than the tax collectors and prostitutes. Because they had a responsibility and failed to repent. Which one would God be the most pleased with? The obvious answer is the one who repents. Jesus addresses the hypocrisy of the chief priests and elders. He says "The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Mat 21:31). The call for repentance came from God through God's chosen messenger, John the Baptist. Sinners respond and repent. So, the despised outcasts, tax collectors, sick, and Gentiles are more favorable to God than the chief priests and elders.

The contemporary lesson is in regards to the second son Christians. They say they believe. They say they are Christians. But they are absent and inactive. They says the right thing. They made a public confession of faith and promised a changed life but do not respond as Jesus teaches us to respond. The contemporary lesson is for both the individual and the church. The lesson is relevant today because human nature does not change. You are a child of God with amazing family dynamics. You are a sibling of Jesus. You have received God's grace. It is up to you to respond in a manner that is pleasing to God.