

Passion Week

April 30, 2017

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.

During Passion Week there is a lot of action. Most of our attention tends to be focused on the Last Supper, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. I thought it would be beneficial to cover some of the other things that went on during Passion Week because there are several very important and valuable lessons. Today's Scripture is one example of this.

In Matthew chapter 21 Jesus enters into Jerusalem on what we now know as Palm Sunday. Then there what is commonly referred to as the cleansing of the temple. Jesus overturned the tables and drove out the merchants because they had disgraced God by using the temple for profit instead of worship and taking advantage of the poor. This goes on today in our society as some religious institutions are more interested in maintaining the institution than they are in caring for the people. Jesus said "this is a house of prayer but you are making it a den of robbers."

There is a lot of healing and the blind and the lame came to Jesus in the temple. By this point in the Scripture only the children continue exalting praise towards Jesus. They cried out "Hosanna to the Son of David." The Scripture does not give us the details but the adults seem to refrain from praising Jesus. We do not know why the children cry out this exaltation but not the adults. It could be the adults knew something was going on with religious leaders. The religious leaders saw many of the amazing things that Jesus did and instead of praising the good deeds and acknowledging Jesus is the Christ, they were angry. Jesus left the temple and went to Bethany to spend the night.

Returned to Jerusalem in the morning and cursed the fig tree which is another example of his divine nature by demonstrating his power over nature. Then Jesus goes back to the temple and teaches. The religious leaders challenge him and demand to know who gives him this authority. The Scripture show us that Jesus is smarter than all of them. Jesus says "OK I will answer your question if you answer this. The baptism of John, did it come from heaven, or human" (paraphrased). They were stuck. They can't say heaven because they did not believe him and they can't say human because the crowd regarded him as a prophet. So they said "we do not know." To this Jesus responded with quid pro quo; tit for tat. "Since you don't know I will not tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Today's Scripture and lesson is Jesus' response to the challenge. A man had two sons with contrasting attitudes. The first one refused to work but changed his mind. The second one promised to work but refused to do so. The question is which one pleases the father the most. The answer is the one who changed his mind. In telling this parable Jesus puts it to the religious leaders. The father in the story represents God and the son that changed his mind represents those that are repentant. The son that did not keep his promise represents the religious leaders. Jesus said hit them pretty hard with these words "tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the

kingdom of God ahead of you.” Jesus brings his opponents face to face with reality. They rejected John whereas the sinners repented. Jesus brings it right to them by demonstrating how they really are and uses their own answer to reveal their faulty action. So, Jesus confronts his enemies. The religious leaders knew that Jesus was talking about them. Instead of learning or repenting they were threatened and refused to admit their wrongs. This shows the extent of their selfish ambition which diverted attention away from an inner attitude toward God.

Jesus is both bold and smart. He reveals the fact that the religious leaders carried their legalism to an extreme. Jesus hit a nerve – the self righteous attitude of supremacy. They thought they were better than others and looked down on others because they thought they were closer to God and thought they were better at pleasing God. Due to their self righteous indignation they failed to repent. The people that the religious leaders despised were the ones that actually pleased God because they are the ones that repented.

The Lesson for us is in regards to how the Scripture connects with us in our lives today. What pleases God is not a matter of perfection, though that would be the ideal. What pleases God is when people repent of their transgressions and change. The Scripture is a simple lesson on understanding which is the better of the two, the no that turns out to be a yes, or the yes that turns out to be a no. It is a simple lesson on words versus action. Whereas words are never a substitute for deeds. The physical action itself means a lot more than a promise to do the physical action. The key to pleasing the father was not to tell him the words that he wanted to hear; the key to pleasing the father was the actual physical action of the participants. Promises cannot take the place of action as words are no substitute for deeds.

The lesson is a simple lesson on relationships. Most of us have children and all of us have been children or are children. When daddy says "children it's time for you chores" it is the yes child that lets his daddy down. It is the child that does the chores that pleases his or her daddy. the Scripture is an example of what is known as passive aggressive behavior. This is not a medical term and it is not a personality disorder. The term "passive aggressive" originated in the army. It refers to problem behavior where a soldier fails to accomplish a task, that he or she is responsible for, after reassuring the commander that it will be done.

The Scripture connects to us today in its relevance to the contrast between what we say and what we actually do. We Christians sometimes please God but sometimes we let God down. God is pleased with the sinner that repents. However, repentance is not just a matter of words. Repentance requires a change of heart and changed behavior. God is pleased with the sinner that repents regardless of the nature of the sin.

Jesus addresses religious leaders who claimed to be righteous and claimed to be loyal to God but actually rejected reject Gods messenger. We can learn from this and understand that we too cannot claim righteous and reject Gods message. It is true that the text often demonstrates a problem then is a problem today. The problem then was that the religious leaders had an attitude of self-righteousness that hindered their ability to repent. The self righteous teach that it is the other person that is bad, wrong, try to shame them, and look at them as being unworthy. The problem is a matter of pointing the finger at the other person instead of looking inward at the self. The righteous teach the love of God. It is not about the other. It is about the self. We are all sinners and we all need repentance. It is when we actually repent that we please God.