

“Show Your Love”

Matthew 21:23-32 and Philippians 2 1-13

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North Presbyterian Church

Matthew 21:28-31 “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Jesus is answering the religious leaders question regarding authority. The father has authority. At the time Jesus told this parable the father was considered the head of the household. All honor, respect and obedience belonged to the father. At that time it was only the head of the household that could own land. This father is an excellent provider for he has a vineyard. Honor your father and mother makes God's top ten list of ways to live. Pure requests from your father are to be honored and followed.

God is our mother and father. God created us. God provides everything. God deserves all our honor, respect and obedience. Jesus has authority because Jesus is God. There is only one requirement for membership in this church that you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You do not need to be a member to feast at the Lord's Table, to be spiritually nourished with Holy Communion all who trust Jesus as Lord and Savior are welcome. Baptism, confirmation and upon becoming a member the same question is asked. Do you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? The savior part is expressed at the end of the parable. Right at the beginning is the issue of Lord. Lord is defined as a person who has authority and power; a ruler to whom service and obedience is due. Jesus is our Lord. Jesus provides us with everything. Jesus is all wise, all powerful, all loving. Jesus has authority over every aspect of our being. We owe Jesus everything. All glory, power, honor belong to Jesus. The greatest commandment is **Matthew 22:37 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.** Jesus has authority for Jesus is our Lord.

What do you think? God, your Lord, asks you to work in the vineyard. God asks you to love everyone, even your enemy. God asks you to share and help those in need. God asks you to develop your gifts and abilities, to hope, to dream to follow your passion, to be joyful. God asks you to forgive others, forgive yourself. God asks you to tell others about God's grace, peace and abundant life. God asks you to be the beautiful, wonderful, unique, cherished, loved, one of a kind person God created you to be. God asks you to enjoy time with God. God asks you to love. God asks you to do something. At times you say no, but later change your mind and do it. At other times you say yes, but never follow through. Which time are you doing the will of God? The religious leaders said, **Matthew 21:31 “The First”**. I say neither. The defiant no lacks honor, is selfish, insults authority, shames God and reveals one's desire to take God's rightful place as Lord. The yes with no action accomplishes nothing. What do you think?

Jesus said to the religious leaders, **Matthew 21:31 “Truly I tell you, the corrupt tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”** Did you hear the amazing grace of God in Jesus reply? Jesus has a lot of harsh words for the religious leaders and rightful so for they were making lots of mistakes. These religious leaders were questioning Jesus' authority in hopes of finding grounds to crucify him. Jesus reply to them comes just three days before they crucified Jesus. Jesus said to them, **Matthew 21:31 “Truly I tell you, the corrupt tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”** Both sons are going into

the kingdom of God. The religious leaders are going into the kingdom of God. We have been exploring the kingdom of God for weeks. The kingdom of God is both glorious eternal life in heaven and a present reality that can be experienced right now.

Jesus said to the religious leaders, **Matthew 21:31-32** “**Truly I tell you, the corrupt tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.**” 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.

“John preached a short sermon. **Matthew 3:2** “**Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the kingdom of God is near.**” The corrupt tax collectors, prostitutes and all who believe John that the kingdom of God is near, that forgiveness, peace, joy, love abundant life is near, that believe Jesus is Lord and Savior, they get into the kingdom of God first. They experience some of heaven right here on earth as they marvel in God’s forgiveness, enjoy God’s healing, savor restored relationships, relish their redemption and celebrate Jesus their Lord and Savior forming them into a glorious person. The religious leaders, the scoffers, the murders of Jesus, they will one day get into the kingdom of God as well. Since they cannot let go of their anger, hatred and guilt; since they are unwilling to turn from their sins and turn to God; since they are unable to profess Jesus as Lord and Savior; since they are unable to fathom God’s grace that forgives, heals and makes them and everyone whole, they will have to wait until their resurrection to experience the kingdom of God. What do you think about your life? How do you resist Jesus as Lord and Savior? How have you pushed away the kingdom of God? How have you at times behaved like the first son saying no to God then later doing God’s will? How have you at times been like the second son saying yes to God then not doing what you promised? Amazing grace, Jesus is our savior! Both sons, all of us, are going into the kingdom of God.

What do you think? Jesus is inviting you into self discovery. Jesus is inviting you to recognize and embrace the authority of God’s will that will resurrect all. How are you like the second son saying yes to God but then failing to act? Barbara Brown Taylor said “There is no shortage of people who say, believe, or stand for all the right things. There have always been plenty of those in the world. What God is short of are people who will go where God calls them and do what God gives them to do.” Sjorn Kirkegaard, said “Jesus wants followers not admirers.” The Apostle Paul wrote, **Romans 7:15** “**I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don’t do it**” This is an ongoing dilemma for us all. Most of us, most of the time, know what is right. We usually can discern which way is the most excellent way of love, however, we often stumble when it comes time to actually do. We get easily distract. Jealously, anger, apathy, selfishness, fear flare and push us of course. We tell Jesus we will go yet we still have not gone. If you say you love God then show God with your life.

Two days early Jesus entered Jerusalem. A crowd in awe of Jesus’ healing, feeding of the hungry and teachings shouted words of praise. They shouted yes to Jesus then at Jesus’ trail later that week many hid, others were silent and some yelled crucify him. Jesus disciples all said yes to him, promised loyalty yet each one of them personally betrayed him. A hungry Jesus couldn’t even get a single fig from a fig tree he created to bear fruit. What do you think? How do you say yes to Jesus and then fail to act?

How are you like the first son with the defiant no? Sometimes the no is our resistance to authority, it is our rebellion to not proclaim Jesus as Lord. The first four of God’s top ten ways to live all deal with the issue of authority, of living in a way that reveals God as Lord. The first commandment states **Exodus 20:2-3** “**I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other Gods before me.**” Sometimes we say no by making our lord money, work, awards, wining, popularity, some person, our self, an idol. Proclaiming Jesus as Lord is discovering that your life, everything

you have, every blessing all belongs to God so in gratitude you give back to God. Only God is truly Lord.

Sometimes we just don't want to do God's work. No, I don't want to forgive. No, I don't want to love my enemy. No, I don't want to share. No, I don't want to serve. No, I don't want to worship. No, I don't want to glorify you, God, with my lifestyle and work. No, I don't want to be dependent on you, God. No, I don't want to do that ministry, to teach Sunday School, to be an elder or deacon, to clean the church, to invite my friend to church, to make dinner for someone in need, to visit the sick. No, I don't want to work the concession stand. No, I don't want to give my money to you, God. But then you do it and in obeying God you discover the kingdom of God. There is freedom in forgiveness, hope in serving, meaning in loving, peace in believing, joy in worship, blessings in doing God's will and abundant life in the living of God's requests.

We all defy God's authority. Anna Carter Florence writes, "Every way we can defy authority, we do it. We splutter and grumble, we pretend to follow through or forget to, we sneak and snarl and slumber and change our minds. We throw our weight around and say, "Don't even think about asking me to participate in this ministry, because I won't! We promise to be there, absolutely, without fail—and then we aren't. You can't help but think, 'Well, I'm not too impressed with either son, actually. It sounds to me like this entire family is due for a major disciplinary overhaul.' But how do you overhaul a human being?—a human being who seem programmed to defy and disappoint and in the end, depend on grace alone? Is this the church? Is this what the church has to work with—human beings who defy authority in every conceivable manner?! Yes, thank goodness and thank God. Just like the parents of those two sons, we try to keep holding one another in love and accountability, so that our first defiance or lapse might not be the last word. We try to keep holding on for one another the chance to repent and turn around."

This parable is good news for all of us. God the Father gives us everything. God calls us to work. God has confidence in our ability to do the work. God gives us room and freedom to do the work. When we fail to do God's work Jesus invites us to learn from our mistakes, put our failings behind us and try again to do God's will. This parable is abundant with compassion, overflowing with love and reveals endless forgiveness for all of us who make poor choices, disobey God and fail to love.

Jesus is savior. Jesus is gracious. Both sons, the corrupt religious leaders, prostitutes, corrupt tax collectors, all of them, all of us, everyone gets into the kingdom of God. We all fail to honor God's authority. We all fail in honoring Jesus as Lord. We all fail to do God's will. We all are saved by grace alone. Jesus' parable begins with authority and ends with grace. Jesus is our Lord and Savior. What do you think? Amen