

The Way of Empty Words (PM)

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[0 : 00] Well, hello everybody. It was exciting times in Matthew 21. We read this story.

Exciting times. Christ had just entered Jerusalem. And you know the story that people had put down the palms and then shouted, Hosanna! Jesus rode in on a donkey.

Hosanna means Saviour. Jesus had accepted that name. Then he heads into the temple and he kicks over all the tables of all the dodgy vendors there.

And it causes a huge drama. And then he starts teaching. And whilst he's teaching, the religious leaders of the day send a delegation to him and say, By what authority are you doing this?

Nothing Jesus had done had been sanctioned by any official body. So it was a hostile question. And it was sort of a, what do you think you're doing? Sort of question.

[0 : 59] And it was supposed to put Jesus on the defensive, but it didn't really work. Now instead of responding directly to the question, Jesus responds with his own question.

Question in verse 25. The baptism of John. Where did it come from? Baptism of John. Where did it come from? That's what Jesus says to this delegation.

Now John's baptism ministry was all about repentance. The king has come pointing to Jesus. Now in asking this question about John the Baptist, Jesus was not trying to be evasive like a politician in a debate or anything.

He was cleverly trying to get to what was behind the question that the Pharisees had asked. So let's see how it plays out.

Okay. The baptism of John. Where did it come from? So the question is asked. The chief priests get in a little huddle and they realize they're hooped by this question.

[2 : 03] Because if they say John was a prophet of God and what he did was totally legit, they also have to acknowledge what John said about Jesus.

And the Pharisees aren't going to do that. But if they say John was just a dude doing unusual things in the desert, unsanctioned strange things, then they're going to upset all the people that followed John.

And John the Baptist was very, very popular. So the chief priests, they take the cowardly but politically expedient option of pleading ignorance and they just say, look, we just, I don't know. We don't know. We don't know what that was about. And we know politicians do this sort of all the time. They refuse to acknowledge facts because they don't want to annoy their base of voters. This is exactly what the Pharisees and chief priests were doing here.

So what does Jesus do? He just keeps digging. He wants to keep getting in. He wants to keep going and find out what's going on with these Pharisees. So he digs deeper and he tells them a parable.

[3 : 08] And then he asks them another question. So the parable, you've heard it. Father has two sons. He asks one son to go to work in the vineyard. That son says, I will not.

But later on, changes his mind and goes back to work. So this first son, this first son says no. There's no.

And I read this story and I'm like, yeah. I mean, this is just, I mean, this scenario plays out 20 times a day in my house, right? This is like, oh, yeah, yeah, that's fine. But if you're from a more traditional culture, a straight up no to your father, that's an outrageous response.

We see, though, after saying no, the son changes his mind. And that phrase changes his mind. It literally means repentance. The son repented and went to work in the vineyard.

Now the second son, the father asks the other son, go work in the vineyard. He says, yes, sir, yes, sir, which literally again means yes, Lord. But in the end does nothing. So that's the parable.

[4 : 12] So the Pharisees, the Pharisees are asked, who did the father's will? And, of course, it's a no-brainer. It's a multi-choice.

It's 50-50, you know. Of course, the first son is the one that did the will of God. And Jesus follows this up with the most, one of the most outrageous things he's ever said in verse 31.

Truly I say to you, and what that means, just that first little phrase, truly I say to you, that means what I'm about to say is critically important. It's very, very, very important what I'm about to say. You need to absolutely listen to the next thing. Truly I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes will go into the kingdom of God before you.

So it's an astonishing statement. So how does that connect, that parable connect, to the stuff we just heard? All the stuff that's preceded it. Here it is.

[5 : 09] So the first son in the parable represents the prostitutes and the tax collectors. The first son that says, no, I'm not going to go work in the vineyard.

These are the people who said a great big no to society's values. Who said a great big no to the good of the community.

Who said a great big no to God. Who said a great big no and we're just going to do whatever we need to do to get by. We're just going to do whatever we want.

But they met Jesus. And he changed their mind. And they experienced the love and radical welcome of God. And they were changed. And they went to work for their father in the vineyard. And they said, no, I don't know. They were changed. The second son, the yes sir son. These are the religious leaders. These are the people that Jesus is speaking to.

[6 : 07] And perhaps they started their faith journey with real ideals. But at some point they were corrupted. Corrupted by status or power.

And Jesus is quite specific about this in two chapters later in Matthew 23. Let me read a snippet. But Jesus says of the folks he's speaking to right now. The religious elite. He says they preach but they do not practice.

They do all their deeds to be seen by others. They love the place of honor and feasts. And the best seats in the synagogues. And greetings. In the marketplaces. And being called rabbi. They love their gig.

It's a great gig. They love the power. They love the status so much. They love it so much. That when the Messiah actually turns up.

They don't recognize him. Or they refuse to recognize him. I mean think about it. These were the people best equipped to recognize the Savior.

[7 : 10] The most religiously savvy. They had been praying and yearning for the Messiah. And he turns up in their neighborhood.

And they make it their goal to kill him. That's what the parable meant. Prostitutes and the tax collectors will get in before the religious elite.

Now have a look at verse 32. It's very important here. 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 when you saw it.

You did not afterwards change your minds and believe him. This is really, really important. Jesus said. You did not believe John. When he talked about the Messiah.

And maybe. Maybe you could sort of go. I could give them that. But people's lives were changed. People's lives were radically turned around.

[8 : 17] It says. I'll read it again. And even when you saw it. These tax collectors and prostitutes having their lives turned around. You did not change your mind. The most unlikely people. Their lives were radically transformed.

And the Pharisees saw it. They saw the evidence of the Messiah. And they refused to believe. What does that tell us? It tells us that the chief priest's problem was not so much an intellectual problem with Jesus.

It was a matter of will. They simply put aside the evidence. And refused to believe. And why would they do that? Because they had a great gig.

Because they were privileged people. And believing in Jesus would mess with that privilege. So they refused to believe. Because self-interest trumped the evidence.

And that's the basis of a lot of unbelief. Because believing would mess with my autonomy. It would mess with my social standing.

[9 : 25] Believing would require me to give up things that I don't want to. So I refused to believe. And this is what Jesus was trying to get at. Folks.

That is the passage in a nutshell. Now. Now. For those of you who like straightforward application. Let me give you two takeaways. The first is this.

The religious leaders who opposed Jesus were really, really respected. Like. As I'm talking about them. I make them out to be. You know. Like these terrible, terrible people.

But in the community. They were so well respected and loved. They were the elites of the day. They were the influencers. The culture makers. They were the media. The governance.

They were all wrapped into one. Very, very, very well respected people. And if you started to follow Jesus back in the days. It meant going against. It meant going against.

[10 : 22] The supposedly brightest minds in your community. Following Jesus meant going against. The most influential people. In their community.

And it is the same for us today. Most of the smartest. The most famous. The most influential people. Are not following Jesus. And that can be intimidating.

And we can start to think. Do I have it wrong? Do I actually have this wrong? Am I the one on the wrong side of history?

Folks. I just want to give you this. This first thing is just about this point here. Don't be intimidated. By powerful people's disbelief.

Don't be intimidated by elite's disbelief. Because for a lot of them it's just not real. It is not intellectually honest.

[11 : 26] It is a deliberate and willful disbelief. In order to protect personal autonomy. Because the idea of a God.

Of a Messiah. It does. It generates a lot of conflict in us. For example. If I am created. My life is a gift. I owe the creator my life. But if I'm not created.

I'm free to do whatever I want. And even if the world. The universe screams to us. Created order. Created order.

Created order. That last option is pretty attractive. There is no creator. I'm free to do what I want. That's a very attractive option. So many, many people just refuse to believe.

Because it serves a lifestyle they want to live. So all that to say. Don't be intimidated. By disbelief. Second point.

[12 : 23] Second takeaway. Matthew 21 reminds us. Of the wonderful hope there is in Jesus. The most. Outsider. Of outsiders.

Prostitutes. And tax collectors. Their lives were. Radically changed. The gospel can change us. And it should keep.

Changing us. And my question. And my challenge. This afternoon. This evening is. Is it still doing that in your life? Is the Holy Spirit still working in your life?

I read a line from a book this week. That just punched me in the chest. And this was the line. Here it is. When was the last time. You changed your mind. Or your behavior.

Because Jesus is Lord. I'll say it again. When was the last time. You changed your mind. Or your behavior. Because Jesus. Is. Lord. It's good to say the right things.

[13 : 32] Like the second son. In our parable. But. Think about the first son. Folks. Obedience. Really. Does matter. I think it's a good question.

To think about. And I'll leave you. To think about it. Now. To think about it.