

Who does what the Father wants?

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[0 : 00] So, as some of you might be aware, last week we looked at the parable of the ten virgins in relation, of course, to the return of Christ. It may strike you odd that I'm now turning to Matthew 21, where we're looking at a different parable, but nonetheless one that relates as you would expect.

So, Matthew 21, verse 28 through to 32, a short parable, but we'll now hear God's word.

So, Matthew 21, verse 28. What do you think? A man had two sons, and he went to the first and said, son, go and work in the vineyard today.

And he answered, I will not. But afterwards he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same, and he answered, I'll go, sir.

But did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said the first. Jesus said to them, truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

[1 : 25] 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.

Well, may God bless both the reading of his word and the explanation of it. We're going to come back. So, one of the things that happens is a lot of people whisper in my ear, which is good if they're whispering nice things.

And it's good to be reminded. And, of course, your wife is going in tomorrow, isn't she, Brian? So, I think it would be good if we could perhaps bring her before God in prayer.

Father, we pray that you would be with Hazel both this evening and tomorrow. Be with Brian as well. Be with the whole family, Luke and Caleb.

But for Hazel, as she goes in to have her child, their child, we pray that your grace would just surround everything.

[2 : 34] And your mercy and your goodness and your wisdom would just be poured into that tomorrow. And that, Father, that all would go well for them.

That mother and baby would be well and healthy and fine and Brian too. And that as a family, they would be able to enjoy tomorrow evening as a grown family.

So, Father, we ask your blessing upon Hazel in particular and the new child to come in Jesus' name. Amen. So, this parable is striking for a number of different reasons.

One of the main reasons it's so striking is because of the reasons why Jesus is telling it. Only become apparent if you are aware of what Jesus has just been saying.

If you look down at your Bibles really quickly, last week we understood that a parable works in a number of different ways. It could be telling the difference between what is right and wrong. It could be asking you to spot where the profit is.

[3 : 50] What would it profit a man if he gained the whole world and forfeited his soul? In other words, Jesus is telling you something so that you would arrive at understanding where the true profit is.

Last week's parable was a slightly different one. Again, it wasn't about right and wrong, although those were in there. But it was about how a person can disadvantage themselves through making wrong decisions.

And how a person can advantage themselves by adhering to the wisdom of God, applying the wisdom of God, asking for the wisdom of God.

And so, that parable, the ten virgins, was about advantages and disadvantages. And one of the disadvantages is that when it comes to the things of God, sometimes you can lose something that can never be regained.

There's always tomorrow. And the point of that parable is, well, maybe not. Well, there is always tomorrow. Well, maybe not, Jesus is saying. And that seriousness is to be driven home.

[4 : 57] This parable here kind of works in the same way in that that attitude of there's always tomorrow is sort of buried in the two sons.

With a little difference, we are aware. The parable here reveals the attitudes of people, not only to Jesus, but to something that belongs to Jesus, which is authority.

Jesus has already, verse 23 to 26, had his authority questioned. One of the ways that you sort of divert your attention away from listening to Jesus is to question his authority.

Because if you discredit his authority, that he doesn't have the authority to say the things that he does, then why listen to him? Okay? You know, when people speak on a subject, some people can speak out of their sphere of competence.

And some people can speak, you know, with a great deal of authority on the matter. And this is incredibly important, especially with websites, for instance.

[6 : 04] And I don't know if you know, but you probably don't. But Google now realized how urgent it is to make sure you have websites that are authoritative.

So, for instance, if you typed into Google, what are the signs of a heart attack? The last thing you want popping up on the first page is incorrect information.

Okay? Some wannabe dietician, not dietician, but diagnostic, you know, the guy who diagnoses something, saying, well, these are the signs, getting it completely wrong, you reading that advice, and going off with that terrible and bad information.

So, the question of authority and the words that are spoken are incredibly important. The religious people, they want to discredit the authority of Jesus. They just don't want to listen to him.

And so, Jesus raises this in a form of a question regarding John the Baptist. John the Baptist comes on the scene. You know that he points to Jesus. He even says that I'm not even fit to untie the sandals of Jesus.

[7 : 12] And Jesus then uses John the Baptist and says, now, is John the Baptist's baptism unto repentance, by the way? So, it's worth adding that so we don't forget what type of baptism it was.

Was that from heaven or was that from man? Okay? Was that from heaven or was that from man? Now, of course, that type of questioning is important for the people who are listening to Jesus because they have a problem.

If they say it's from heaven, then they also have to say that Jesus is the one with all authority because everything that John has done is to point towards Jesus. So, if they give John the credit, as in what he's doing is given to him by God above and he's fulfilling the authority of God above on earth, then that draws attention to everything John said about Jesus.

And so, what they do is they don't answer. They don't answer. Why? Because the moment they answer, they will give credit to Jesus, which is the very thing they don't want to do.

And so, by not answering, neither do they are looked upon in a bad way by the crowds because if they discredit John, everyone in society loves John because they recognize that he's a prophet sent from God.

[8 : 37] So, rather than saying, no, he isn't, what he does is man-made rather than from heaven and have the people against them, they don't want that, but neither do they want to acknowledge the authority of Jesus.

So, they keep absolutely quiet. So, when you begin to read this parable about two sons, the issue, the underlying issue that actually drives this parable home is a question of authority.

And we know that for two reasons. Firstly, notice what verse 27 says. Verse 27 says, So they answered Jesus, we do not know.

Well, they do know. They just didn't want to say. Hence why Jesus says what he says next. And he said to them, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Okay? In other words, if you're going to keep quiet, I'm going to keep quiet. But then he, verse 28, goes straight into a question. And the question is, what do you think?

[9 : 42] What is Jesus trying to get at by asking a question? Well, one of the things he's trying to get at is an answer. Okay? I've been around enough people, Jesus is saying at this point, kind of, to know what you're doing by not giving the answer that you ought to be given.

And this type of claim comes up all the time of people who don't want to give an answer. So the parable that we have read together this evening and the parable that we're trying to understand is

about the authority of Jesus and the authority of the word of God, Jesus speaking. But it's also about people who don't want to answer the question. And that comes out all the time. Pastors face this all the time.

In fact, anyone who disciples another person faces this same situation over and over again. So the question goes something like this. What does Jesus teach about the love of money?

Well, it could be, I don't know. Or it could be, if I'm wasting my money on things that I shouldn't be, I don't know. Okay? That deliberate ignorance, okay, that avoidance of asking the question is a way of hiding, okay, defaulting what you truly believe, defaulting your actions.

[11:09] Okay? People do it all the time. What does Jesus teach about marriage? Well, I've not read that part of the Bible. And they push it off. So you say, well, would you like me to explain it to you?

Oh, not right now. Okay? And then what happens is you take the issues of the love of money or you take the issues of marriage or you take the issues of something entirely different within Scripture.

And then they'll go, if they don't like the answer, well, it's all a matter of interpretation anyway. So now you go from the question all the way back to authority. Okay?

Who has the authority of interpretation? So you can actually get away from the issues that Jesus is dealing with here. Okay? People who don't want to answer, okay, are noticed for them not giving an answer because their answer would reveal something about what they're doing and why they're doing it.

That they're either not actually following Jesus like they're doing something that they are unrepentant of. And that's exactly the point that Jesus is getting at when he tells this parable about change.

[12:21] Because you'll notice it's about the change of mind. The first son changes his mind. Jesus finishes the last verse with, because they changed their minds, you didn't change your mind afterwards.

Everything here is about will a person change their mind once they've been told by the authoritative word of God? Will you change? In other words, if I can convince you that what you're hearing is God's word, and I can convince you that it is the authority of God's word, and you're doing something that perhaps isn't consistent with following Jesus, upon hearing it, will you change your mind?

And the answer is, maybe you won't. Maybe you won't. It's so incredibly painful, isn't it?

To know that I can actually be told something by God, right, and know that it's from God, and still go, let me think about that.

Or, my favorite, I'm still on a journey. Which is another way of saying, I've got a lot of learning to do. In other words, the answer's plain and simple, but I'm not there yet.

[13:35] No, you really are there. And that diversion tactic is like the second son who says yes, but doesn't do anything. So, this parable is about whether or not people change upon hearing the will of God.

Not just the word of God, but the will of God. So, here's the summary. You'll notice that Jesus picks on two sons, and the two sons represent two different people groups. On the one side, you've got the sort of profession son.

He's the second one. Yes, I'll do. Yes, yes, I believe. Yes, I follow. Yes, yes. And all of that. He's like the religious leaders of the day. He's like the people who affirm God.

And then you've got the first son, who are represented with the tax collectors and the other people mentioned there. And they're like, no, we don't care.

We're just doing what we want to do. And, of course, in the course of the parable, the first son, who initially says no, changes his mind to a yes. And the second son sticks with his profession only.

[14:48] Now, it looks like initially that the distinction is between two different types of people, these religious leaders and tax collectors. But when you read the parable, you begin to realize that they're just identifications that don't really mean anything to how Jesus is identifying them.

In other words, in society, people are identified as religious, as tax collectors, as other things as well. And what that means is, is that in that type of world, we can categorize people like that.

But Jesus says, no, the categories here are not what they do for a living or what they're like morally. The issue here is whether or not they do the will of God. So, on closer inspection, what defines the two sons apart is one who says no at the beginning says yes at the end, doing the will of God.

And one who says yes at the beginning but doesn't actually do anything with it, effectively saying no to the will of God. What actually defines these two sons apart is whether or not they actually do God's will.

Regardless of who they are, regardless of what type of upbringing they have, regardless of what clothes that they're wearing. Okay? The issue always comes back to whether or not people listening to the word of God actually do it.

[16:12] Okay? So, when Jesus finishes in verse 22, saying that the tax collectors and these ladies of the night go into the kingdom of God before you.

Okay? Okay? He's drawing attention to the fact that they do that because they have responded to the word of God. They are responding to the will of God. Not because of who they are, but because of who they are now in relation to God.

They are obeying God's will. And that's the distinction being made here. So, let's begin with working in the vineyard.

When Jesus calls both sons to work in the vineyard, two things, or a few things in particular, have to be noticed. The first is this, that Jesus is clearly making a connection between listening to the word, that is, going to the vineyard and work, and doing the word, that is, actually going into the vineyard and doing the work.

Okay? So, there's a connection here between listening to the will of God and doing the will of God. That's what Jesus is expecting. In other words, if I've asked you to go and do it, then I will know whether or not you've listened to me with the authority that I have to tell you by whether or not you actually go and do it.

[17:32] Are you actually going to go into the vineyard and work? So, all of our listening to God's word means that we need to follow that up with our own will. We go and do it.

Only that proves whether or not we've actually listened. Only that proves whether or not we can move beyond a profession. Now, the second thing here is that entering into the kingdom of God is the equivalence of salvation.

To be part of God's kingdom is to be a saved person. And therefore, a saved person is one who not only listens to the word of God, but who does the will of God.

Okay? Now, he isn't saved because he does the will of God. Okay? Not salvation by works at all, ever. But a saved person will always do the will of God.

Will always do the will of God. Now, of course, people can argue over this point, but this is the point that Jesus is making. People who may start off by saying no, who then say yes, are those who repent and believe.

[18:40] Those who repent and believe are saved. Those who repent and believe enter into my kingdom. And those who repent and believe do the will of the Father. And so, the issue here is being asked to go and going shows that you have changed your mind.

And it shows that you have a changed heart concerning the things of God. Now, if there is a disconnect between what a person says and what a person does, we call that person a hypocrite. Okay? Because their profession does not match everything else that they're doing. So that their life gives the game away. Okay? In other words, their life is so loud, you cannot hear what they're saying.

It just drowns out their profession. And so, wherever there is a disconnect between hearing the word and doing the word, there is that same disconnect in that person's life between them and the kingdom of God.

Because what Jesus puts together here is that a person who's in the kingdom is one who's actually changed their mind. It's one who actually has listened to the will of the Lord and completed the will of the Lord.

[19:54] We think, well, that's a little bit cut and dry. Well, right. It is cut and dry. There is no language of, I'm on a journey, because Jesus never introduced those things.

We did. There is no language. People take time to change. Okay? People do take time to change. But that change always happens. And that's what Jesus is addressing here with the son who says no and then says yes.

Jesus is affirming that people might say no at one point and yes at another point. But the issue is getting people to the yes. That repentance. That change of heart and mind.

So, moving on, here's the next thing that we notice about the two sons. And that it is better to say no and be repentant than it is to say yes and be unrepentant.

Okay? Okay? It is, we'd much rather deal with people. Okay? You can get a lot further with someone who says I don't believe in God.

[20 : 59] Okay? Then you can with someone who says they do believe in God, but their life shows no indication that they do. Okay? It's incredibly difficult because there's no clarity there.

And so, when someone moves from a no to a yes, there's a clear distinction between the two. But when someone's saying yes, and then you're looking for the yes further down the line in their actions, okay, there's deliberate ambiguity.

What do you do? It's incredibly confusing. Well, Jesus makes it clear here. Their yes was a profession only, but the yes was never really a yes.

And that person's no, which started off as a no, which became a yes, is what that person is now known for. They have repented. They have changed their mind.

Jesus, under no circumstance, is approving of anybody saying no. No, he's approving of the first son, not because he said no in the beginning, but because his no became a yes.

[22 : 03] Okay? Because his no became a yes. Jesus is not sort of affirming the first son because he said no, but he's affirming the first son because when he said yes, he meant it.

Okay? It was a real definitive change of mind. He repented. He did the will of the Father. So God doesn't rejoice ever over the sinner who is going to repent.

God rejoices over the sinner who does repent. Okay? So God's not rejoicing over the sinner who says, I know, Lord, but I'm going to do it tomorrow.

And God goes, great, I can't wait for tomorrow morning. There's no rejoicing there. There may be rejoicing tomorrow morning if he does actually repent, but God doesn't rejoice over someone who's going to do something, who's going to repent and believe.

He rejoices over the person who does repent and believe. And we see that in the parable of Luke 15 in particular, that there's more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.

[23 : 09] There's great rejoicing. So we know that God enjoys this. This is a wrong word. Rejoices over a sinner who repents. So those people who sort of playing God with the future, sort of, I will turn to God someday in the future.

I will turn to God. I know that I need to. And I know that it's the right thing to do. But I'm just having way too much fun. I'm just able to have it my own way for this.

And so as I said last week with the parable of the ten virgins, the trouble is with delaying it is that you might just delay it one day after Jesus returns. I mean, you don't know when that day is going to be.

But that idea of just pushing it off, in other words, I'll take you seriously tomorrow, Jesus, because at the moment I seem to be having things the way I want them to be.

And Jesus identifies in a person's life that they can do that very thing, pushing it off until tomorrow, trying to buy time.

[24 : 18] And the way that you buy time, okay, is that how many of you have said yes when you've been asked to do something simply to get the other person to stop asking you? Okay?

I have to confess to that. You know, it's not the right place to confess to it. But I understand that if someone's asked me three or four times a day, I'll say, yeah, I'll do it. I promise. I know that that buys me at least half a day.

Okay? And depending on what it is, it might even buy me a couple of days. But I know that as the time ticks along, okay, what do you think the other person's waiting for? Well, they get to the 11th hour and they go, there's no way he's going to get it done in that amount of time.

It's too much to do. Okay? So instead of them waiting, okay, until their 11th hour is finished, they know that you haven't got enough time to do it. So they ask you, are you going to do it?

Are you going to do it? People who say yes simply to buy time, even in this world, have people's eyes on them.

[25 : 22] So how do we think we can ever pull a fast one with God? I'll follow you tomorrow, Lord, I promise. I promise I will be more serious disciple tomorrow, Lord.

I promise that I'll take you seriously in my devotional life tomorrow, Lord. Okay? And the Lord knows that that's not only not taking him seriously, but you're buying time.

And you're normally buying time to carry on doing the things the way you want to do them. Or you're buying time not to do things God's way. You just want to be left alone. That's the issue that you have with the second son.

And so the issue here is not that professions are worthless, but professions that aren't followed up are worthless. Okay?

Saying, I believe the things in the Bible, and then your life doesn't reflect the things in the Bible, means that your profession cannot be taken seriously.

[26 : 23] And that's the point that Jesus is making about the second son. The first son did say no, but in the end, it was clear that he said yes, because he went to work in the vineyard.

He didn't have to say yes. It was obvious that it was a yes, because he put his hand to the plough, as it were. It was obvious that it was a yes, with then him even opening his mouth.

But with the second son, he says yes, and now you're waiting. Right? When's the yes going to materialize? And it becomes clear that when it doesn't materialize, that the yes is not actually a yes at all.

It's actually a no. Right? Not going to do it. And people love that deliberate ambiguity. Okay?

We'll just push some time off for a little bit. Jesus is addressing here the importance of someone changing their mind. And the change of mind is always reflected in the change of will.

[27 : 27] Okay? If you've truly changed your mind about the things of God, whether it be the love of money, whether it be marriage, whether it be about work, whether it be... I'm talking about work.

I saw something on the news the other day that just took me. I just couldn't stop laughing. In fact, I even went to bed giggling about it. And it was this socialist movement of, I don't know, recently or in the past, marching down the street.

And the guy in front of this socialist movement had on his t-shirt, do not steal. And I thought, you probably didn't find that funny, but I thought that was hilarious. Because socialism is stealing.

That's what God says in the Bible. Okay? It doesn't call it socialism. But socialism is taking what belongs to somebody else and distributing it to everybody else. And at some point, you run out of what everybody else has.

And I thought, what a cheat to walk down the road with either he doesn't understand his own party or he's being incredibly sarcastic. So here we have here change and real difference.

[28 : 32] What does real difference mean? Well, it means that it's reflected in your will. If you've really changed your mind, it'll be noticed in your will. This is why the tax collectors and the ladies of the night, okay, make it into the kingdom of God.

Not because they said no, but because their no became a yes. And it was reflected in their will. Here's a few things then as we wrap it up.

There are only two ways that your mind and your whole being will change according to the gospel.

A changed mind always relates to a changed heart, Paul says in Romans 12.

That either you will be renewed in your mind in light of the gospel or your whole life will be conformed to the world. Either you will be renewed or you will be conformed.

So out of all the changes that happen to you in the course of life, they can be summarized into two categories. Either renewal or conformity. Either renewal to the image of Christ and the things of God or conformity to the world.

[29 : 39] There's not really much difference. And so the issue here for these two sons, which is what Jesus is getting back to the point of John the Baptist, is not that these people are waiting around until someone with authority tells them.

Okay? I've come across people, well, I'll wait until someone with all the authority tells me, then I'll believe. Okay? I need to hear it from this.

And, you know, we've experienced this with the young children. And they come back from school.

And because of the authority that school teachers have. But my teacher said. Okay? I don't care.

I didn't, you wouldn't say it out loud. But generally speaking, that authority that is given to people is incredibly powerful. But this idea that we somehow will believe and turn just because the person's got authority just isn't the case.

Hence why Jesus says to these people, where's John's baptism from? Well, is it from heaven or is it from man? In other words, if it's truly a thing of God, then you should be responding to it.

[30 : 45] But you're not. And here I am, God the Son. Why don't you listen to me? And of course, you're not. Pastors, when pastors come into the pastorate first off, we're warned against a number

of different things.

Number one, it's going to take eight years before you're ready. Not two. Okay. It's going to take eight years. The other thing that you begin to realize is that Alan McNabb used to say to me, Daniel, don't make the mistake of drawing people's attention to the authority of God's word because of your lack of feeling as though you have any authority in the church.

And I thought, well, I do feel that no one takes, you know, I'm just a young man trying to proclaim the word of God, trying to direct lives. Who's going to listen to me? Who's going to take me seriously? And he says, one, it's your attention to draw them to Jesus, not to yourself.

Okay. Point taken. And I understand that. But more importantly, young pastors always feel that the way to convince people is to draw people to the authority of God. In other words, God said this.

Are you, this is God's word that you're responding to. God has said, and it's true that it is actually God's word. As you listen to this sermon, is this from heaven or is this from man?

[32 : 03] It is something that you'll have to decide. Are you taking this as that it's coming from God or are you sort of nullifying this by saying it's simply his interpretation?

Okay. We can all do it. Okay. We're all aware of it. And I've been around the block a few times in ministry to understand those subtle shifts that people make. And so the issue here is that even if God told them directly, they still wouldn't believe it.

And that's the point that Jesus is making. That even if God tells you directly, you still wouldn't believe it.

The issue here isn't about authority, as in who's speaking and who should I listen to. The issue is, even if God's spoken, I wouldn't change my mind.

I would divert attention away from myself by saying, yes, I'll go. But I won't actually go. And that's the point that Jesus is making.

[33 : 06] So here's the exhortation then as we close. Okay. Professions matter, but the only matter as much is they are reflected in your will. No's are always wrong before God.

And yes's are always right. Anybody can profess one thing and do another. Anyone can be a professing Christian and yet a practicing atheist.

And we see that over and over again in the New Testament. Jesus puts us on the spot with the same two questions that he gives these people here. What do you think?

Which actually does? The will of the Father. The one who says he will or the one who actually goes and does it. So when it comes to professions, they are limited in their usefulness.

Totally limited. Because God is going to look to see what comes next. Here's the final thought then. The final thought. Every single one of us sat here this evening is faced with the same question.

[34 : 17] That as we listen to the word of God, as we receive the challenges that we do from the word of God, Do we believe that they are from heaven or from man? Now, three answers.

Okay? Only three answers. Number one, yes, I believe them to be in line with the authority of God's word. Number two, no, I don't. And number three, I don't know.

Okay? What else is there? Yes, I believe. No, I don't. Or three, I don't know. And Jesus seems to be indicating that the person who wants to say I don't know is equivocating.

I don't want to give an answer. Because if I give an answer, then what am I going to say about all these other things? Right? If I say yes to this, then that opens me up to being questioned on every other area that I attend to.

Okay? And that's the point that Jesus is making here. Whatever you say at any point, either you're always revealing yourself before God.

[35 : 25] And so as you listen to the word, not only this evening, and not only this morning under Francis, whether it's in Sunday school, wherever it is, the thing that we're all faced with, even me as I stand here and read these words to myself and preach it to myself, is this.

Do I believe this to be from heaven? Or simply from man? And that's what I have to face. That's what we all have to face. Amen. Amen.