

MATTHEW 21:23-32

THE WEEK WAS STILL YOUNG, AND YET IT HAD ALREADY TURNED OUT TO BE MORE STRESSFUL AND CHALLENGING THAN THE JEWISH LEADERSHIP IN JERUSALEM ANTICIPATED.

OF COURSE THEY KNEW THE WEEK WAS GOING TO BE A DIFFICULT ONE WITH PASSOVER BEGINNING NEAR THE END.

PASSOVER, YOU SEE, MEANT AN EXTREMELY LARGE NUMBER OF JEWS WOULD BE IN THE CITY AND THE TEMPLE, AND THAT ALSO MEANT THE ROMAN SOLDIERS WOULD BE ON HIGH ALERT.

THEN THERE WAS THE FACT POLITICAL RIVALS KING HEROD AND THE ROMAN GOVERNOR PILATE WOULD ALSO BE IN THE CITY, AND WHO KNEW WHAT EITHER OF THEM WOULD DO!

NATURALLY THE TEMPLE AND THE JEWISH CIVIL AUTHORITIES HAD PLANNED FOR THIS, SINCE NONE OF THOSE THINGS WERE UNEXPECTED DURING PASSOVER.

BUT THEN, WHEN JESUS OF NAZARETH ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM THE STRESS REALLY GREW.

IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM IF THE RABBI FROM NAZARETH HAD SLIPPED INTO THE CITY LIKE ANY ORDINARY PILGRIM, EVEN LIKE HE HAD DONE ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS.

THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, JESUS' ARRIVAL WAS ANYTHING BUT QUIET OR ORDINARY.

THERE HE WAS RIDING ON A DONKEY WITH HIS DISCIPLES AND OTHERS CHEERING AND SHOUTING PRAISES TO GOD:

“HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID. BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST”.

THE LEADERSHIP, OF COURSE, HAD DEMANDED JESUS QUIET THE CROWD, BUT HE REFUSED TO SILENCE THEM.

AND WHAT HE DID AFTER THAT- TOPPED HIS VERBAL DEFIANCE OF THE TEMPLE AUTHORITY.

HE MARCHED RIGHT INTO THE TEMPLE COURT, AS IF HE OWNED THE PLACE, AND TOOK A WHIP TO THE MONEY CHANGERS AND ANIMAL MERCHANTS DRIVING THEM AWAY.

THE NEXT DAY HE WAS BACK TEACHING INSIDE THE TEMPLE AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED!

IT WAS THEN SOME CHIEF PRIESTS, REPRESENTING THE TEMPLE, AND SOME OF THE ELDERS, REPRESENTING THE CIVIL AUTHORITY, DECIDED TO CONFRONT JESUS ONCE MORE.

THEY CAME TO HIM OPENLY SEEMING TO ASK A REASONABLE QUESTION ABOUT WHO AUTHORIZED HIM TO ACT AS HE HAD.

BUT OF COURSE THEY HAD A HIDDEN AGENDA, THEY HOPED TO ENTRAP HIM BY THEIR QUESTION SO HE COULD BE DEALT WITH QUICKLY.

AND SO THEY ASKED HIM THE QUESTION,” BY WHOSE AUTHORITY DO YOU DO THESE THINGS?”

JESUS RESPONDED BY TURING THE TABLES ON THEM, USING A TRADITIONAL TEACHING METHOD OF RABBIS, WHICH WAS TO ANSWER A QUESTION BY ASKING HIS OWN QUESTION.

FURTHERMORE, BY RAISING THE ISSUE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, JESUS SEEMED TO SET HIS OWN TRAP.

THE IMPLICATION WAS THAT- THE RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP IN PARTICULAR, SHOULD HAVE KNOWN IF JOHN'S BAPTISM WAS DIVINELY AUTHORIZED, OR MERELY JOHN'S OWN DOING.

THE FACT THEY ANSWERED, “WE DON'T KNOW”, REVELED THEIR IGNORANCE ABOUT GOD.

WE, OF COURSE, ARE AWARE THE ANSWER WAS LESS AN EXPRESSION OF IGNORANCE- THAN IT WAS GOVERNED BY A DESIRE TO NOT HAVE THE CROWD TURN AGAINST THEM.

ONE MIGHT IMAGINE THOSE MEN PULLING BACK FOR A MOMENT TO WHISPER AMONG THEMSELVES HOW BEST TO ANSWER.

AND THE KEY FACT IN THE TALKING WAS NOT TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY BELIEVED WAS RIGHT, BUT RATHER HOW TO RESPOND SO THAT THEY DID NOT INCITE THE CROWD.

HOWEVER, SINCE THEY CLAIMED NOT TO KNOW ABOUT JOHN, JESUS COULD LEGITIMATELY REFUSE TO ANSWER THEIR QUESTION ABOUT HIMSELF.

AFTER ALL, THE BAPTIST TESTIFIED ABOUT JESUS, SAYING HE WAS SENT FROM, GOD.

THE IDEA IS THAT IF THESE MEN DID NOT BELIEVE JOHN WAS SENT FROM GOD, THEY WOULD NOT ACCEPT JESUS' AUTHORITY EITHER.

THIS IS WHY HE REFUSED TO ANSWER THEM DIRECTLY BECAUSE IF HE PROCLAIMED HIS IDENTITY THEY MIGHT ACCUSE HIM OF BLASPHEMY.

AND SO WE FIND, FOR THE MOMENT, JESUS SIDESTEPED THE EFFORTS TO GET HIM TO PUBLICLY CLAIM HE WAS THE MESSIAH.

WE MIGHT SAY THAT JESUS WON THAT PARTICULAR VERBAL SPARRING MATCH.

AND YET, WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT FOR JESUS IT REALLY WASN'T ABOUT WINNING.

BUT INSTEAD IT WAS ABOUT OPENING HIS PEOPLE'S HEARTS AND MINDS UP TO THEIR GOD.

AFTER ALL, JESUS KNEW HE HAD ONLY A FEW DAYS LEFT TO COMPLETE HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY AS A TEACHER.

THEREFORE, EVEN WHEN IT CAME TO THOSE WHO WERE AGAINST HIM, JESUS' DESIRE WAS TO PREPARE THEM TO RECEIVE THE SALVATION HIS DEATH WOULD PROVIDE.

INDEED, JESUS SOUGHT TO HEAL THE BROKEN RELATIONSHIP THE JEWISH LEADERS HAD WITH GOD, AS MUCH AS HE DID THAT OF MORE BLATANT SINNERS.

THE FORGIVENESS HE OFFERED FROM THE CROSS FURTHER EMPHASIZES THE LOVE JESUS HAD EVEN FOR HIS ENEMIES.

THE PARABLE THAT HE TOLD THAT DAY WAS OFFERED OUT OF A SIMILAR DESIRE TO OPEN THE EYES OF THE PRIESTS AND ELDERS TO THEIR OWN FAILURE TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD.

LET US BEGIN WITH THE SYMBOLISM IN THE STORY BECAUSE IT IS IMPORTANT.

FIRST, THE VINEYARD WAS A COMMON METAPHOR FOR ISRAEL, AND SECONDLY, THE TWO SONS REPRESENT TWO KINDS OF JEWS, BOTH OF WHOM ARE SINNERS.

THE PARABLE ITSELF IS A SIMPLE ONE-THAT DESCRIBES TWO DIFFERENT SONS, WHO ARE BOTH DISRESPECTFUL TO THEIR FATHER.

THE THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE BEHIND THE PARABLE IS THAT BOTH OF THE SONS ARE SINNERS, WHICH MEANS NEITHER IS TRUE ROLE MODEL.

THE KEY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO IS THAT WHILE THE FORMER FAILED TO HONOR HIS FATHER BY HIS REFUSAL TO OBEY, HE REPENTED- CHANGED HIS MIND AND HIS ACTIONS.

AND WHILE THE LATTER SON, WHO SPOKE RESPECTFULLY, MAY HAVE INTENDED TO OBEY, HE MUST BE FOUND GUILTY OF FAILING TO KEEP HIS WORD, AND HONOR HIS FATHER.

LISTEN TO THIS YOUTH ORIENTED POEM THAT PRESENTS THE STORY LESS FORMALLY AND YET HOLDS TRUE TO THE MESSAGE.

I SHARE IT BECAUSE HEARING THE PARABLE IN A DIFFERENT WAY MAY HELP US TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT JESUS WAS TEACHING.

“A MAN HAD TWO SONS AND SAID TO THE ONE- ‘GO WORK IN THE VINEYARD TODAY MY SON.’

BUT THE SON AT FIRST JUST WOULDN'T OBEY- ‘I'M NOT GOING TO WORK, NO NOT TODAY.’

BUT LATER HE CHANGED HIS MIND AND WENT, EVEN THOUGH BEFORE HE DID NOT CONSENT.

HE ASKED THE SECOND SON THE SAME- 'SIR, I'LL GO; HE DID PROCLAIM.

BUT DIDN'T GO AS HE SAID HE WOULD, THROUGH I'M SURE HE THOUGHT HIMSELF GOOD.

WHICH OF THESE TWO DID THE FATHER'S WILL? THE FIRST ONE DID AND THE OTHER DID NIL.

THEN JESUS SPOKE TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND TO THE ELDERS MISSING THE FEAST.

THOSE WHOM YOU THINK DON'T HAVE A CLUE, ARE ENTERING THE KINGDOM AHEAD OF YOU.

JOHN SHOWED THE WAY, YOU HAVEN'T BELIEVED. BUT SINNERS REPENTED, HIS WORD THEY RECEIVED.

AND EVEN AFTER YOU SAW HOW THEY DID REPENT, YOU DIDN'T REALLY SEEM TO CARE WHAT HE MEANT."

THE BEAUTY OF THIS POEM IS THAT IT HIGHLIGHTS THE KEY POINT JESUS WAS MAKING WITH THE PARABLE.

HIS POINT WAS HOW MUCH THE RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR LEADERS IN ISRAEL WERE A LOT LIKE THE SECOND SON.

THEY SAID ALL THE RIGHT THINGS TO GOD, BUT DID NOT REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THEIR PROMISES TO GOD.

INDEED, JESUS EMPHASIZED THAT THE SO-CALLED RIGHTEOUS JEWS, WHO LOOKED DOWN ON THEIR MORE OBVIOUSLY SINFUL BROTHERS AND SISTERS KNEW LESS ABOUT JOHN THAN THEY.

YOU SEE, THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THE TAX COLLECTORS, PROSTITUTES, AND OTHER SINNERS- GOING TO JOHN FOR BAPTISM- WAS THAT THEY BELIEVED HE WAS GOD'S MESSENGER.

WHILE UNRIGHTEOUS SINNERS, IN THE EYES OF MANY, THEY HEDED JOHN'S CALL TO REPENT, WHILE MOST SO CALLED RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE DID NOT.

THIS MEANS THEY WERE MORE IN TUNE TO THE LORD THAN WERE THOSE WHO OPPOSED JESUS, BUT WENT AROUND PORTRAYING THEMSELVES AS RIGHTEOUS MEN.

BUT, AS WAS SAID EARLIER, JESUS WASN'T TRYING TO WIN AN ARGUMENT HERE.

INSTEAD HE SOUGHT TO WIN THE REPENTANCE OF THOSE WHO QUESTIONED HIS AUTHORITY.

AFTER ALL, THERE WAS NOTHING, BUT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRIDE THAT PREVENTED THEM FROM SEEING AND REPENTING OF THE ERROR OF THEIR WAYS.

UNFORTUNATELY, AS WE KNOW, JESUS' MESSAGE WAS LOST ON MOST OF THOSE IN AUTHORITY IN JERUSALEM.

HOPEFULLY IT IS NOT LOST ON US, BECAUSE THE MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE IS STILL RELEVANT TODAY.

INDEED, WE NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT CHRISTIANS ARE SOMETIMES LIKE BOTH OF THE SONS IN THE PARABLE.

THERE ARE TIMES WE BEGIN WITH DISOBEDIENCE BUT THEN HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART, AND OBEY THE LORD.

AND THERE ARE OTHER TIMES WE SAY "YES" TO GOD WITH OUR LIPS, AND "NO" TO GOD BY FAILING TO DO AS WE SAID WE WOULD.

THUS THE LESSON IS THAT – TALK IS CHEEP, IT IS OUR DEEDS, ALONG WITH OUR DESIRE TO LOVE THE LORD, THAT SHOW OUR TRUE INTENTION.

OF COURSE THE GOAL WE ARE CALLED TO SHOOT FOR IS TO HAVE OUR WORDS COMPLIMENT OUR ACTIONS AND OUR ACTIONS COMPLIMENT OUR WORDS, AND BOTH REFLECT OUR LOVE FOR GOD AND OTHERS.

INDEED IF WE SAY JESUS IS LORD- THAT MEANS WE RECOGNIZE HIS AUTHORITY OVER US, MEANING OVER EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES.

THIS UNFORTUNATELY IS OFTEN EASIER SAID THAN DONE, SINCE EVEN THE MOST SINCERE CHRISTIAN IS STILL A SINNER.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT JESUS LOVES SINNERS, AND HAS OPENED THE DOOR TO FORGIVENESS THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

JESUS ALSO SENDS TO US THE HOLY SPIRIT TO HELP US LET GO OF FEAR OR PRIDE AND STEP THROUGH THE DOOR OF REPENTANCE.

SOME VERSES OF THE HYMN "STANDING ON THE PROMISES" PROCLAIMS THE GOOD NEWS WE HAVE IN THIS WAY:

"STANDING ON THE PROMISES I NOW CAN SEE
PERFECT, PRESENT CLEANSING IN THE BLOOD FOR ME.
STANDING IN THE LIBERTY WHERE CHRIST MAKES FREE,
STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF GOD.

STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF CHRIST THE LORD,
BOUND TO HIM ETERNALLY BY LOVE'S STRONG CORD,
OVERCOMING DAILY WITH THE SPIRIT'S SWORD,
STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF GOD.

STANDING ON THE PROMISES I CANNOT FALL,
LISTENING EVERY MOMENT TO THE SPIRIT'S CALL
RESTING IN MY SAVIOR AS MY ALL IN ALL,
STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF GOD."

TRULY, OUR HOPE IS IN GOD, BECAUSE HIS PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS AND SALVATION THROUGH HIS SON IS TRUSTWORTHY.

ALL GLORY, HONOR, AND PRAISE BE TO GOD, FATHER, SON,
AND HOLY SPIRIT, NOW AND FOREVERMORE. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: MATTHEW 21:23-32

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS THAT THE FORGIVENESS THE SAVIOR OFFERED FROM THE CROSS EMPHASIZES THE LOVE JESUS HAD EVEN FOR HIS ENEMIES.

THE PARABLE THAT JESUS TOLD THAT DAY WAS OFFERED OUT OF A DESIRE TO OPEN THE EYES OF THE PRIESTS AND ELDERS TO THEIR OWN FAILURE TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD.

LET US BEGIN WITH THE SYMBOLISM IN THE STORY BECAUSE IT IS IMPORTANT. FIRST, THE VINEYARD WAS A COMMON METAPHOR FOR ISRAEL, AND SECONDLY, THE TWO SONS REPRESENT TWO KINDS OF JEWS, BOTH OF WHOM ARE SINNERS.

THE PARABLE ITSELF IS A SIMPLE ONE-THAT DESCRIBES TWO DIFFERENT SONS, WHO ARE BOTH DISRESPECTFUL TO THEIR FATHER.

THE THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE BEHIND THE PARABLE IS THAT BOTH OF THE SONS ARE SINNERS, WHICH MEANS NEITHER IS TRUE ROLE MODEL.

THE KEY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO IS THAT WHILE THE FORMER FAILED TO HONOR HIS FATHER BY HIS REFUSAL TO OBEY, HE REPENTED- CHANGED HIS MIND AND HIS ACTIONS.

AND WHILE THE LATTER SON, WHO SPOKE RESPECTFULLY, MAY HAVE INTENDED TO OBEY, HE MUST BE FOUND GUILTY OF FAILING TO KEEP HIS WORD AND HONOR HIS FATHER.

JESUS' POINT WAS HOW MUCH THE RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR LEADERS IN ISRAEL WERE A LOT LIKE THE SECOND SON. THEY SAID ALL THE RIGHT THINGS TO GOD, BUT DID NOT REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THEIR PROMISES TO GOD.

INDEED, JESUS EMPHASIZED THAT THE SO-CALLED RIGHTEOUS JEWS, WHO LOOKED DOWN ON THEIR MORE OBVIOUSLY SINFUL BROTHERS AND SISTERS KNEW LESS ABOUT JOHN THAN THEY.

YOU SEE, THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THE TAX COLLECTORS, PROSTITUTES, AND OTHER SINNERS- GOING TO JOHN FOR BAPTISM- WAS THAT THEY BELIEVED HE WAS GOD'S MESSENGER.

AND WHILE UNRIGHTEOUS SINNERS, IN THE EYES OF MANY, THEY HEEDED JOHN'S CALL TO REPENT, WHILE MOST SO CALLED RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE DID NOT.

THIS MEANS THEY WERE MORE IN TUNE TO THE LORD THAN WERE THOSE WHO OPPOSED JESUS, BUT WENT AROUND PORTRAYING THEMSELVES AS RIGHTEOUS MEN.

BUT, JESUS WASN'T TRYING TO WIN AN ARGUMENT HERE. INSTEAD HE SOUGHT TO WIN THE REPENTANCE OF THOSE WHO QUESTIONED HIS AUTHORITY.

AFTER ALL, THERE WAS NOTHING, BUT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRIDE THAT PREVENTED THEM FROM SEEING AND REPENTING OF THE ERROR OF THEIR WAYS. UNFORTUNATELY, AS WE KNOW, JESUS' MESSAGE WAS LOST ON MOST OF THOSE IN AUTHORITY IN JERUSALEM.

HOPEFULLY IT IS NOT LOST ON US, BECAUSE THE MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE IS STILL RELEVANT TODAY. INDEED, WE NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT CHRISTIANS ARE SOMETIMES LIKE BOTH OF THE SONS IN THE PARABLE.

THERE ARE TIMES WE BEGIN WITH DISOBEDIENCE BUT THEN HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART, AND OBEY THE LORD. AND THERE ARE OTHER TIMES WE SAY "YES" TO GOD WITH OUR LIPS, AND "NO" TO GOD BY FAILING TO DO AS WE SAID WE WOULD.

REMEMBER, IF WE SAY JESUS IS LORD- THAT MEANS WE RECOGNIZE HIS AUTHORITY OVER US, MEANING OVER EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES. THIS UNFORTUNATELY IS OFTEN EASIER SAID THAN DONE, SINCE EVEN THE MOST SINCERE CHRISTIAN IS STILL A SINNER.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT JESUS LOVES SINNERS, AND HAS OPENED THE DOOR TO FORGIVENESS THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION. JESUS ALSO SENDS TO US THE HOLY SPIRIT TO HELP US LET GO OF FEAR AND PRIDE, AND STEP THROUGH THE DOOR OF REPENTANCE.

TRULY, OUR HOPE IS IN GOD, BECAUSE HIS PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS AND SALVATION THROUGH HIS SON IS TRUSTWORTHY. AMEN