

Matthew 21: 23-32

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

²³ When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' ²⁴ Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?"' ²⁶ But if we say, "Of human origin", we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.' ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

The Parable of the Two Sons

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.'

I have called this talk the two ways of Saying No to God.

The religious leaders we see in the first part have a problem - they aren't looking for truth. What they are doing is protecting their authority. They love being in control. When they ask 'By what authority are you doing these things?'

They aren't asking Jesus a neutral question.

What they are saying is who do you think you are and what right do you have to challenge us?

Then as happens so often Jesus tells a story to illustrate his point and to fire a dart at their closed and hard hearts. The question is who is really in charge. Me or you?

V 28. Jesus starts with a question.

What do you think?

The gospel demands that we think. We listen and we absorb what he says and teaches.

That's Jesus's question for us this morning.

What do you think?

Upon the invitation

The first son says 'I will not' I won't come - and I've called him the obvious sinner. He is honest about his rebellion and later on we see that he changes his mind. He eventually comes.

The second son I've called the respectable sinner. He says the right things but his obedience is only verbal. It all about externalities rather than inner humility. It's for show and as a result see this. he never comes.

Here is the key part

Jesus then points to the-tax collectors and prostitutes.

Look at them?

They are entering the kingdom ahead of you.

Think about this?

What and who are they? The morally compromised.

This is again Jesus confronting us with the scandal of grace.

What Jesus is doing is exposing our real problem. That don't lack evidence about who Jesus is.

What we lack is willingness to repent.

Willingness to embrace him and follow him. To embrace change. Willingness to relinquish their hearts.

The biggest barrier to faith is so often not intellectual it's about the hearts desire to be in control.

Jesus welcomes a certain type of person.

He welcomes those who know and see they need his mercy. And then ask for it.

Jesus says this: 'Yes Father' and he does what neither son in the story is able to do. He gives the father perfect obedience so that we don't have.

Do you see what he's is saying? There are two ways to be far from God. You can run away from him or you can stand next to him and refuse to need him.

One says 'I will not'

The other says 'I will sir' but neither at the outset gives God their heart.

The gospel point us to a third true Son. One who truly says yes on our behalf. The

son who went into the Vineyard and who went to the cross. And he says both to the rebellious and to the respectable.

‘Come home’

Seemingly, according to the story - it's only the rebellious who do so.