

Matthew 21.28-32

A Call for Self-Examination

Matthew 21.28

After Jesus derails the Jewish leadership's question about his authority, he doesn't allow the interaction to end but instead asks, "But what do you think?". This phrase signals that Jesus is not done with his opponents but wants them to think, reflect, and slow down. He tells them a parable about two sons and their father. The father asks the first son to work in the vineyard. The father requests the son to work.

Matthew 21.29

The first son answered no. He refused to work in the vineyard but afterwards regretted it and worked. The word "regret" is translated from the root word that means "repentance", the first son repented of his initial rejection and worked.

Matthew 21.30

The father then requests the second son to work to which he said, "yes, sir" but did not work the vineyard. Unlike the first son, this second son is not said to regret anything. This concludes the parable. It's short and concise.

Matthew 21.31

Jesus asks the leaders "which of the two did the will of the father?" To which they correctly respond the first son. Though the first son rejected initially he came to his senses and worked whereas the second son said yes but did not work. Then immediately Jesus shockingly declares that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God before "you". Remember this is not a private conversation. It's public, in the temple, with many people around.

The tax collectors and prostitutes are the first son who rejected the way of God until they heard and John and Jesus, then they repented. The Jewish leadership on the surface displayed godliness but inwardly refused

to repent. Therefore, sinners will enter the kingdom before those who have the appearance of godliness.

Matthew 21.32

Three times the word "believe" is used by Jesus. The leaders refused to believe in John's preaching, the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe, and witnessing them believe they were not moved to believe but remained unbelieving.

Reflections

I. What is "the will of the Father?"

This phrase appears twice in Matthew, 7.20, 12.50. In both passages the theme of faith and repentance are connected. The will of God is to repent and believe something the tax collectors and prostitutes did but the Jewish leadership did not. Am I doing the will of the Father?

II. Confession of faith does not guarantee Possession of faith

Simply saying "I believe" or having the appearance of faith does guarantee one actually believes. Read Matthew 7.20 and I John 2.3-4. The Jewish leadership was under a delusion they were ok with God when they were not. This is why Jesus asks, "what do you think?" He saw them as they really were.

III. God cares about the heart

God is vastly more concerned with the inner life of a person than their appearance. Education, religious activity, and appearance does not impress him. God wants heart obedience no matter who you are or what you've done. Read I Sam. 16.7 and Isaiah 66.2

IV. Jesus models not shying away from hard/uncomfortable truths

Jesus spoke difficult and offensive truth to those who needed it. If he never said anything, the Jewish leadership would remain self-deceived. Are you a disciple who will speak uncomfortable truth when it is needed most?