

A Matter of Authority

Matthew 21:23-32 Text vs. 23 *“When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching and said, ‘By what authority are you doing these things. And who gave you this authority?’”*

A young man wanted a custom paint job on his car. It had to be two different colors. The right side one color. The left side a different color. When asked why, he said he didn't want anyone to recognize him by his car and its color. What was he up to? Running from something? Running from someone? Or was he like the young man who couldn't make up his mind which side of the fence to be on. So, he became a fence sitter?

And in our lesson today, when the chief priest and the elders in the Temple asked Jesus a question about His authority while He was teaching in the Temple, they hoped to make a fool out of Him. The only problem was, Jesus bounced their question right back at them with a question of His own. ²⁵ *“John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”* Either way they answered, it would make them look bad. *“They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn't you believe him?’”* This method of answering a question with a question was a regular method of debating used by the Rabbis. Usually, questions have an obvious answer. This question did have an obvious answer. And the crowds knew it! They believed John was a prophet and were outraged at the treatment he had been given. They didn't blame these Rabbis for that. They put it squarely on the shoulders of Herod who John the Baptist criticized for his marriage to Herodias, formerly the wife of his half-brother. She nagged Herod so he would imprison John. Still not satisfied, she tricked her daughter Salome to ask for John the Baptist's head in return for dancing at her stepfather's birthday feast. Herod gave in and had John beheaded. Yet, the problem for these Rabbis still was, *“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all hold John as a prophet.”*

So, as they tried to trap Jesus with their trick question, Jesus would have said His Authority came from God and they would have accused Him of Blasphemy. That's something you say, or do, that shows you don't respect God. But if He had said He was acting in His own authority, the crowd would have listened to the Rabbis. So, when Jesus answered the Rabbis question with another question, it showed they really didn't know what to do. So, our text this morning is, how do *your* words match *your* actions? Do your actions and your words show which side of the fence you're on when it comes to being obedient to the Will of God? Are you *obedient*? Or are you *rebellious*? Everything you do says something about who you are and what you believe. Matthew 12:37 says, *“by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”* meaning the day of judgment, which Jesus referred to as His Second Coming at the end times. At that time, all people will stand before Him. Unbelievers. Those who have rejected faith in Christ. All will be forced to stand on their own before God.

And it was right after the chief priests and the elders refused to answer Jesus' question that Jesus told them a parable about a father who asked his two sons to go to work in his vineyard. The first son said “no,” but later changed his mind and went to work in his father's vineyard. The second son said “yes,” but refused to go and work at all. So, when Jesus asked which son did the will of their father, they all answered the *first*. And it was then that Jesus told the chief priest and the elders that sinners would be going ahead of them into the kingdom of God before they would. He was pointing out to them they were like the second son in the parable who said that he would go into the vineyard to work but did not live up to his word. That second son had said, *“Oh yes, I will go!”* But in the end, he didn't go! He went right on with his life as usual. It was *that* son who was the *rebellious* son. It was *that* son who became the most grievous son to his father. It was *that* son who represents those in the church today who say *“Sure, I will work in the vineyard. I will witness to the lost. Yes, I will work in the church. I will do what God has asked me to do.”* But, when the “the moment” and the “excitement” has passed, the opportunity is lost. The commitment and promises are gone. And life returns as usual. Unprofitable to the Kingdom of God! Jesus said, *“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?’”* ²³ *Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”* (Matt. 7:22-23)

There's going to be a *Day of Reckoning!* For all of us! And on that day, it will be too late when you find out that your “good enough” *wasn't* “good enough!” Many will call out, *“I was in church every chance I had to be there. I gave my tithes and offerings faithfully. I helped the church every chance I had. I witnessed to people of the Love of Jesus Christ. I did a lot of wonderful and great works for the Kingdom of God!”* But then, some will learn that *wonderful works* weren't “good enough” to get them into Heaven. *“You must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what you have heard, so that you do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall you escape if you ignore so great a salvation?”* (Hebrews 2:1-3) The second son's attitude was like so many Christians have today! Yes, Lord I will do what you ask. *But they don't!*

The Apostle Paul understood that! He had to constantly keep his own desires and his own life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It was his goal to always obey the Call of God. To preach the Gospel. To work in the “vineyard of God.” He was the “first son” in our lesson today. Paul started out by not only rejecting the message of the Gospel. He even stood by guarding the coats of those who stoned Stephen. ⁵⁴ *When the council members heard Stephen's speech, they were angry and furious.* ⁵⁵ *But Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. He looked toward heaven, where he saw our glorious God and*

Jesus standing at his right side.^[b] 56 Then Stephen said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!" 57 The council members shouted and covered their ears. At once they all attacked Stephen 58 and dragged him out of the city. Then they started throwing stones at him. The men who had brought charges against him put their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul" who had persecuted Christians all throughout the land of Israel. (Acts 7:54-58) But in the end, he said "yes" on the road to Jericho and obeyed the call of God. Paul became the greatest of all the Apostles. In the end, he said "yes" to Jesus and was saved from his sin. Even so, Paul was concerned that he would lose his salvation through disobedience. He was constantly on guard against becoming too self-satisfied. He was constantly renewing his commitment to be obedient to the Call of God.

That's where you should be this morning! Watchful. Not allowing Satan to deceive you into *not* doing any work of the church. You *must* be involved. You *must* stay involved. Stay busy. Keep working for the Lord so you won't find yourself cast aside on the *Day of Reckoning!* Which son are you? Have you said "no," but deep inside you really want to follow the Lord? If you do, then today's the day you can come to Jesus and finally say "yes." But have you said "yes?" Even accepted Christ as your Savior? And then quit working in His vineyard?

Have you fallen into Satan's trap believing his lies and getting caught in the web of life's cares and troubles? Have you missed God's Call to work in His fields? If that's you, then turn your eyes upon Jesus and surrender your life back to Him today! Put on your working clothes. Get busy in the fields of the Lord! God's work is what He has called you to do. It's still there waiting for you to obey Him! Do it now, don't wait! It may be too late tomorrow. Or even tonight! Don't force God to cast you aside. Don't be an unprofitable son! He's waiting for your answer. He already has a great life prepared for you if you will only obey Him and go to work for Him right here in Everglades City. That's what we're supposed to be doing. Pointing people to Jesus! Your job is to tell someone you know about Jesus! One of the best ways of doing that is to simply have that person read their Bible. Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else. Let that person read Jesus' words. Then, step out of the way. Let that person stand face to face with the Word of God. The idea basically is this. Decent people feel they will go to heaven someday. That's not in the Word of God. Your job is to correct that. Warn sinners. There's a coming Judgment. And you better be ready for it! Now, let's get to work! AMEN