

Doing the Will of the Father

Matthew 21:28-32

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.*

29 *And he answered, I will not, but afterward he changed his mind and went.*

30 *And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, I go, sir, but did not go.*

31 *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.*

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 when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*

Introduction

In the past two weeks three of us in this church who have attended the funerals of our fathers. Rich Saron's father died on June 7th. Allison Stirling's father died on June 11th. And my father died on June 16th. This past Sunday was our first Father's Day without our fathers. Many of you have already walked this road and some within in the last year, so you know what this experience is like.

This past Thursday night I shared my experiences over the past two weeks with the elders and they asked me to briefly share it with you.

The Call from the Hospice Nurse

As you know, my father had been battling cancer for the past three and a half years. On Monday, two weeks ago, June 8th, at about 3:00 p.m. I received a call from the hospice nurse telling me that in her opinion my father was “actively dying.” He was refusing to eat. She recommended coming quickly. I met with Iain Monday evening and we “cleared the decks.” I was on a plane to Louisville, KY the next morning.

A Fortunate Visit in April

Fortunately our family visited my dad in mid-April. Even then the cancer had worked shocking effects on his body. He was down to 111 pounds. He had been 170 lbs. for his entire life. I told our children then that this would probably be the last time they would see him alive.

After our visit in April he became progressively worse. My father lived alone so me and my two brothers begged him to come live with one of us. We all live in three different states. The middle brother, Mike, took a leave of absence from his job in OH and moved to KY to care for dad. **The Lord gave him a job in KY in a weekend.** The Lord's hand was obviously with him. He was with dad for six weeks.

Two Prayers On the Flight to KY

On the flight to KY I journaled two prayers. First, I asked the Lord to let him live until I arrived. Second, I asked permission to be with my father when he did. I wanted to be with him when he died because of something Diane Zickell told me.

Diane is a hospice nurse and she has been at the bedside of many, many people as they have died. She told me she could always tell believers in Jesus from unbelievers because of how they die. Unbelievers fear and fight death while believers are calm and exhibit an uncommon peace in their final moments. This is the reason I wanted to be with dad when he died. I wanted to see if his final moments were filled with fear and peace.

I never doubted my father's salvation until my parent's divorced, which happened when I was twenty one. After the divorce my father withdrew and separated himself from all fellowship with Christians. This caused me and my brothers great concern and we spoke to him about this often (1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed out of death and into life, because we love the brothers*). He always assured us verbally that he was trusting in Jesus, but his conduct left us wondering.

Are You Afraid To Die?

When I arrived in KY, he had already been four days without food. I went to dad and asked him, "Daddy, are you afraid to die?" He looked me straight in the eye and calmly said, "No son, I'm not." This gave me some peace, but I still wanted to be there in that moment (of death) to see if his actions accorded with his words. My brothers and I took turns staying with dad throughout the week.

Times of Testing

As the weekend rolled around, he became increasingly weaker and less and less responsive. As many of you know it is times like these that test the limits of patience and endurance. Saturday was the community yard sale in his neighborhood. Dad gave us permission to sell some of his things. Deciding on what to sell caused a rift between my two older brothers (who are 9 & 10 years older than me). Their already raw emotions reached a breaking point and I thought they might come to blows. Harsh and hurtful words were exchanged that ought not to have been said. This all happened within earshot of my father and our entire family; all the nieces and nephews heard this dispute.

We're Going Back To Texas

My oldest brother, Butch said, "I'm done here. We're going back to Texas." I could do nothing to stop him. At 2:00 p.m. they left. At 7:00 p.m. they returned and there was a visible difference in his demeanor. It was obvious from his face that something remarkably good had taken place.

I Was Admonished By My Son

I asked my brother, "What happened?" He said, "I was admonished by my son." My sister-in-law then filled me in on the details. She said at supper my brother asked, "Does anyone have anything to say before we leave for Texas?" My 21 year old nephew, also named Jabe (whom you may remember spent a month with us here last year), said, "Yes, I think you need to apologize to your brother for what you said to him and ask his forgiveness." My brother then said, "Does anyone else have anything to say?" All three of his other children said, "We agree with Jabe." So after a moment's deliberation, my brother Butch consented to returning to make things right.

Forgiveness & a Family Meeting

My brother called for a family meeting. About 15 of us gathered in dad's living room. Both of my brothers apologized to the entire family for their sinful language and for their attitudes. They asked for forgiveness. They each apologized to the other and to all of us who heard their dispute. Forgiveness was granted.

We then had a family prayer time that lasted for about 30 minutes. We then left the living room and walked back to dad's bedroom and sang hymns to him for another 30 minutes. He rolled his eyes a couple of times as a note or two was off key. That was the last time he was fully awake and alert.

13 Days Without Food; 4 Days Without Water

He barely hung on for three more days. He went thirteen days with no food and the four days without water. The only water he had was what he received from us swabbing his lips.

The LORD Gave Mike His Job Back

Monday afternoon my brother Mike received a phone call from his former employer in OH. He reported that they had reversed their previous decision and would hold his job for him until he returned. They wanted him back. Mike & I looked at each other. The LORD was giving him his job back! We both knew dad would not last much longer.

Dad's Final Hours

Tuesday night about 23:45 I laid down on the floor beside my father's bed. I listened to his slow breathing and wondered how much longer he would last. I was not sleepy so I began journaling.

After a bit I held his hand and talked to him (though he didn't respond). I thought about what I would say at the funeral. I thought about his wilderness wanderings of the past 20 years. I said, "Dad, we will honor you for all you did that was right. We will not remember your mistakes. We will remember all that you did that was right."

His breathing began to slow. I could see his heart beating. All of his life he weighed 170 lbs. He could eat bag after bag of Hershey's Kisses and never gain a pound! Yet now he was only a skeleton. He was then under 100 lbs. He was completely emaciated. I held his unresponsive hand. Those powerful hands that had a grip unlike any man I have ever met. Now, they could not even produce the slightest squeeze. With my right hand I held his hand and I put my left hand on his heart (up under his rib cage). His breathing slowed even more.

I yelled for my sleeping brother to join me. He was hard to awaken. Dad's breathing slowed significantly. I yelled again for my brother. Then again, only louder. My father tilted his head slightly upward. A half grin appeared on the right side of his mouth and it remained several seconds, unlike the fleeting, sporadic facial twitches that had become normal over the past week. Then the grin spread to the left side of his mouth and remained a couple of seconds.

Then there was a deep exhalation. His head relaxed and his heart stopped. I yelled again as loud as I could for my brother. My brother walked into the room. Then there was one final gasp for breath, but he was already gone. The body yearned for one more breath, but his soul had already departed. The light had gone out of his eyes. I said, "Good bye my daddy," then I wept.

The Lord Answered My Prayer

The Lord answered my prayer. He let me be with my father when he died. My father held my hand as I came into this world and the Lord granted my request to hold his hand as he left this world. He died peacefully.

Dying peacefully is no guarantee that the soul is saved, but according to those who are near to many when they die, it is a significant pointer. I thank the eternal God for giving me the precious gift of being with my father as he took his last breath. How he died gives me peace.

His final actions did accord with his words.

This is what the text this morning is about. It is about the importance of what you **DO** over against what you merely **SAY**. In deed, actions more clearly reveal the true love of the heart than do words.

The Reason for the Series on the Parables

This is the reason we preached this series on the parables - to help you more easily **DO** the will of God. The parables are so practical and deal with such ordinary events of life. We (the elders) felt the Lord leading us to this series for this specific reason. We wanted God's word to make a practical and tangible difference in how we live our lives EVERY day.

We prayed that God would use these simple yet profound stories to transform the way we think and act when we are **not** together as a church family. We wanted these stories to make a difference in what you DO in your daily lives. We wanted your actions, what you do every day to look more and more like your LORD and Savior, Jesus, the living Son of God.

We prayed that God would use these 18 parables to cause you to look at the world through the eyes of Jesus and not your own eyes. We pray that these stories would remain in your minds long after you've heard them. We desire that God would cause these parables to bear much fruit in our lives.

The Parable of the Two Sons

In the parable before us this morning, Jesus compares the actions of two sons. The father asks both sons to go work in the vineyard (Matt 21:28). The first son tells the father he will not obey his command. He reports that he will not go into the vineyard to work. However, after the father goes away he begins to think. And after thinking about things for a little while, he changes his mind and decides that he will obey his father's command and off he goes into the vineyard to work.

The second son does the reverse. He immediately responds positively to his father's command but later fails to act. He says, "Yes, father, I will go work in the vineyard" (21:30), but as he thought about things he decided that he would **not** go into the vineyard to work.

Jesus asked the chief priests, elders (21:23), and Pharisees (21:45) which one did the father's will. They correctly answered, "The first" (21:31).

Jesus then said to the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees,

Matthew 21:31-32

"Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before 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 when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*

The chief priests and elders had just questioned Jesus' authority. This takes place in the final week of Jesus' life. It's most likely Tuesday, the day after Jesus had cleared all the money changers from the temple.

The chief priests and elders wanted to know by what authority Jesus did 'these things' (the actions of 21:1-16) and who had given him that authority (21:23). Jesus responded by saying, "*I will answer your question if you first answer mine*" (21:24). He then asks them, "*The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?*" (21:25).

They chose not to answer the question not because they did not know the answer, but because they did not want to admit that John was sent by God which was what everyone else, except them - the religious leaders, believed.

They reasoned that if they said his ministry was from heaven, Jesus would then ask them why they chose not to believe him? However, if they said John's ministry was simply from man, then all the crowds would stone them because they all *knew* John was a prophet sent by God. Since they chose not to answer Jesus' question, Jesus then did not answer their question about His authority. He then told them this parable.

The Meaning of the Parable

The point of the parable is clear. Those who **do** the will of the Father, whether they be tax collectors or prostitutes or Ted Bundy (as Iain mentioned last week), will be accepted by God and welcomed into His kingdom.

Those who simply **say** they do the will of the Father but never actually do it, though they be the most "religious" person on the planet (a professional preacher or evangelist), will be rejected by God and will **not** enter His kingdom.

This would have been staggering to the listening religious elite. It would have incensed them to even consider the prospect of that tax collectors and prostitutes would enter the kingdom and they would not. It would have utterly drove them insane to tolerate such blasphemy! Jesus is obviously off his rocker.

What Is the Will of the Father?

This begs the question, what is the will of the Father? What is it that God wants us to do?

Are good deeds what God requires?

When it came to doing good deeds, the Pharisees, chief priests, and elders were they best! Their lives were filled with "good" deeds - long public prayers, dedicated tithing, regular fasting, they only associated with "righteous" people, the never associated with "unclean" people, they observed the law, and never missed attending synagogue.

As Paul testified about his own Pharisaic "religious" keeping of the law, he said, "*as regards to righteousness under the law, [I was] blameless*" (Phil 3:6). Yet he still lacked something. What did he

lack? What did all the chief priests, Pharisees, and elders to whom Jesus was speaking lack? They certainly did not lack good deeds. So what was it? What were they missing? **What is the will of the Father?** Jesus answers this question for us in John 6:40.

John 6:40

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

It is the will of the Father that we put our faith in Jesus, His only Son. It is the will of the Father that we put our hope and confidence in the righteousness of Jesus and not in any supposed righteousness that we think we might have.

Is it God's will that we do good deeds? Yes, we were created to do good deeds (Eph 2:10) but not as a means of earning salvation but because we are so full of God's love that we want to express our salvation!

And Jesus told the chief priests and Pharisees that changed lives were a testimony to the reality that the message of Jesus' gospel is true. He said,

Matthew 21:32

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 when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Jesus said John came preaching the way of righteousness, but you refused to believe his message. However, the tax collectors and prostitutes believed his message and you witnessed the change in their lives and yet you still refused to believe! When will you change your mind? When will you believe? When will you do the will of the Father? When will you put your faith in Jesus and stop trusting in yourself?

The Pharisees, chief priests, and elders refused to do the will of the Father. They refused to look to Jesus and believe in Him.

So where does this leave God's commands? If we look to Jesus and believe in Him do we still need to obey the law? If we are saved by the grace of God what are we to do with the commands of God? Do we still need to obey them?

Jesus said, *"If you love me you will obey my commands"* (John 14:15).

Matthew 5:17

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jesus did not abolish the Law and the Prophets. He fulfilled them. Keeping the Law is not the means of attaining righteousness. Faith in Jesus is the means in attaining righteousness because He never broke the Law.

When the rich young man asked Jesus what he had to do to have eternal life, Jesus responded by quoting the 10 Commandments (Matt 19:16-19). I don't think Jesus was saying that in keeping every

command the young man would earn righteousness. Anyone who desires to obey God's commands already loves Him. And loving God is the highest and greatest command.

The Summer In the 10 Commandments

The simple truth of the Parable of the Two Sons is one son did the will of his father while the other did not. Which one are you? If we love God we will obey Him. So to help us fall in love with the Lord in a deeper way, we will spend the summer studying the 10 Commandments. One command for each week. 10 Commands. 10 Weeks. We start next week with the first commandment.

His commands are not burdensome. They are an expression of His character. His commands, if we obey them, will keep us from sin. Sin is what separates us from God. So if we obey His word we will remain near to His heart.

The 10 Commandments are the most basic and primary exposition of what the Father's will for us is. ***If we know these commands we will know what God's will is for our lives. And if we know His will we can then do His will.*** Not because we are trying to earn salvation, but because our faith in Jesus causes us to want to express our love for Him.

In 1996 I gave my father a book for Christmas entitled, "A Father's Legacy." It is a self-directed autobiography. It took him six years to complete it. In it he wrote;

I accepted Christ into my life and my heart sometime in the summer of 1949. Mom McCoy showed me and lead me to Christ. In my heart I know God has forgiven me.¹

I really accepted Jesus as my personal Savior. God forgave me of my sins and I felt FREE.²

God is love!!! He even loves me!!!³

No matter how bad of a sinner you are, God in all of His infinite love, does forgive. He died for me and I know He loved me - and me most of all know that I don't deserve 1/1000th of His love or forgiveness! So my legacy is: "God loves all of us and did forgive us -- so I can go to my grave knowing this and as they say, 'Rest in peace!' Amen!!"⁴

That is the gospel. God saves all sinners who call upon the name of His only Son, Jesus. If you do that you will be doing the will of the Father.

¹ *A Father's Legacy*, written by Jabe D. Cravens, Sr. Page 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.