

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Matthew 21: 28-32

“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.”

Would you pray with me? Holy Spirit, would You take these words and help us to understand it? Understand them in our own contexts and how it needs to be applied in our own lives. We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus, the One who spoke these words. Amen.

This is an interesting passage of scripture and often referred to as the Parable of the two sons. For us to understand and see how we can apply it to our own lives, we need to be able to first understand it in its context. What is the context? For that, we actually need to go back to vv. 23-27.

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and they challenged Him and they said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” An open challenge: they stop Him in the middle of His teaching and say: Who gave you the authority and by whose authority are you doing these things and speaking these words?

Jesus is not in any way taken aback, because He throws them a counter question. *He says to them, “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.”*

So He says, “You first answer the question that I’m throwing to you, and if you do answer it, then I will tell you the answer to the question you have posed before me.” What is the question that Jesus posed? He says, “Tell me, the baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?”

Now they go into a bit of a tizzy here, because they know that this is a very difficult question to answer especially in the context of all the people who are listening to them. They thought that they could throw Jesus a curveball, but He ended up throwing it back to them. Why? Because if they answered that the baptism of John was from heaven, then Jesus would say: “Then why don’t you listen to him?” You remember that Jesus said the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And so they are thinking: If we accept that this is from heaven, then we are at fault for not accepting the one whom John, as a prophet authenticated. But then if we say from man, then what about all these people who considered John to be a prophet? They all followed John listening to His every word, and so we would be in great trouble with the people. So they

don't know how to answer the question. In fact, they talk among themselves. It says: *They began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people, for they all regard John as a prophet." And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." So Jesus says to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."* Sorry guys, but if you can't answer my question, then I'm not going to answer yours.

But Jesus isn't done with them. He still has a point that He wants to make even though they have lost this particular 'skirmish' or debate with Him. He poses another scenario for them and asks for their response.

He says, "What do you think? A man had two sons and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' And the first son replied, 'No I won't.'" Straight off he says, "I'm not going to do that." But after that, he regretted what he said and he went and worked. The man then went to the second son and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard." And the second son replied, "Yes sir, I will." And he did not go. Then Jesus asks the question: Which of the two did the will of his father?

A 'no-brainer', isn't it? For us and also for all the priests who were there, for they said to Him, "The first!" Then Jesus says, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and all these prostitutes and poor people will get into the kingdom of God before you. You think you are the religious elite of this place and that you will get into the kingdom first. You won't! These people who are doing the will of God first said no, and then repented and have come back and are doing His will. They will be ushered into the kingdom. But you, even after seeing what has happened, not only with John the Baptist, but seeing the way the people are repenting of their sins, it hasn't moved you to repent and come and be ushered into God's kingdom." And He says in v. 32, "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe Him, and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him."

Now we saw the context and we saw the actual parable that Jesus brought to them reminding them that they were a proud people who would not repent even when they saw what was right and righteous happening before them that their pride made them stand away. I want us to look at this parable in the light of our own experience with God and our relationship with Him. For otherwise we may find that we can very easily put this down to the account of the Pharisees and walk away. But I think it is profound in its implications for us, you and me as well.

What is it that we can notice from this parable?

Genuine obedience after repentance versus pretended or feigned obedience.

Genuine obedience after repenting and saying, "No, I won't do it!" but then doing the will of the Father, versus saying, "Yes Lord, I will do it," and then walking away and not doing it. Notice that when we talk about pride and humility, that seems to flow through this. It's caught up in the words of the second son when he speaks and says almost with such reverence and respect, "I will, sir," and then walks away and doesn't do it.

How often we can come to a place in our lives where we acknowledge God as sovereign, and we know that this is His will. And we say, "Yes Lord," will all due humility maybe, or

respect and awe for God; when we speak to Him – just plain lip service – and then we walk away from Him and do exactly what we want to do.

What can we glean from this parable? I think there are four lessons that we can take away.

1. We ought to do the Father's will.

Obedience to Him is most important. Obedience over everything else! As children of our Father, we need to do His will, not worry about anything else. Just say: If this is the will of my Father, then I must do it over everything else, whether we feel like it, whether we agree with it, or whatever. As children, as sons and daughters of the Most High, citizens of God's kingdom, beloved, we have to be obedient to God who is the King.

2. Having said yes to God, we need to remain faithful and do what we said we will do.

Having heard and said yes to God, we need to be diligent and faithful and do what we said we will do. It is not enough to just hear the will of God. As James reminds us: Don't just be hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word of God as well.

3. Repent. Don't stand on your pride.

When we realize that we have made a wrong choice, repent and be obedient to God. Don't stand on pride. Many times, in our journey, that's how it is. We make a wrong choice and we say, "No Lord. I won't do this." And then we realize that there's no joy outside of the will of God for a Christian. And after some time, we say, "Lord, I'm sorry. I did wrong, and I want to do what is right." At that point, don't let pride creep in, pride of what it would mean to us: Oh my goodness! I'm going back on what I decided I will do. Or maybe it is more public, and you wonder what other people will think about you. That's what you said, and now you're going back on it. Don't let pride creep in. The moment that we know that we have made a mistake, immediately repent and then turn around and do the will that was expressed to us by God.

4. Recognize that God is inviting us to work in His vineyard.

Beloved, stop and think about it: The God of the universe looks at you and me and says, "I want you to come and work for me." The highest calling. A holy calling to do the will of God, to answer God's call when He says, "Come, I want to send you into My vineyard." And for us to say, "Yes, Lord. thank You that You have called me to work in Your vineyard, to work under Your name, with Your authority." What a high calling, beloved. And when we hear that call, for us to embrace it with every fiber of our being, and say, "Yes, Lord," to Him.

I want to just fine tune this a little bit more, because sometimes we look at the will of god and say: I really don't understand the will of God. Well, we have the general will of God and then we have the specific will of God.

The general will of God.

This is for every disciple of God – that we are able to follow these instructions. It doesn't matter who you are, these are across the board, and we follow them.

The specific will of God.

This follows out of the general will of God into specific tasks that He invites us to do based on our calling, based on our gifting, based on our circumstances, based on our location of

where we are and the resources that we may have. All of these specific things that have to do with you and me. That's the specific will of God. I'm not going to go there, because once we understand and follow the general will of God, then the specific will of God becomes clearer to us.

But what is the general will of God for all of us? I want to give you seven points that I think would fall under that category.

- 1) **To be saved.** For to be saved is to be adopted as sons and daughters of the Most High God. Then, to be able to follow His will, to be obedient to His will, as we see in 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9.
- 2) **That we are filled with the Holy Spirit.** In Ephesians 17:18 it says, "Be ye filled with the Spirit of God." That we need to surrender our wills to Him, allow Him the space that He has within us, in every area of our lives. For as we retreat in terms of the areas that we had dominion in, the Holy Spirit then begins to saturate us with His holy presence, taking all those areas under His authority.
- 3) **To be thankful in all things.** That is the will of God as we see in Ephesians 5:19-20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18. To be thankful in all things. Why do I bring that in? Because sometimes we can be grumblers. We know that this is right, and then our joy gets stolen; we grumble about it, we just keep talking about it. We have such a bad attitude and it steals our joy in doing the will of God. "I delight to do Thy will" was how the Psalmist put it. We need to delight to do His will. So to be thankful in every situation whatever the situation, just say: God has allowed this situation and I am thankful for it.
- 4) **To be able to do everything as unto the Lord.** To be able to do everything as if we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:23-24, Ephesians 6:5, 8 says, "Do everything as unto the Lord." So whatever we are asked to do, whatever task we are given, we don't do it for the people who ask us to do it, we do it for God. And when we do it for God, then it must have the very best output from us. We must give of our very best.
- 5) **That we walk in a sanctified manner.** This means that we separate ourselves from the sins and the evils that are around us, so that we can be holy and clean objects in God's hand. 2 Timothy 2:21. This involves each one of us coming away from all the activities and influences that hinder us from serving God with our whole heart. 2 Corinthians 6:17-18.

So, we move along this path of sanctification, constantly letting go of those things that used to be a part of our past and could hinder our present in being obedient to God. We seek after the path of holiness where we are completely in sync and aligned with the word and the will of God.

- 6) **That the will of God could involve suffering.** 1 Peter 3:14-17, and then 4:19 talks about it, that there are many times when the will of God will bring us into a place of discomfort and inconvenience and suffering and heartache. That is par for the course, and we need to accept that.

- 7) **That we are constantly being conformed to the image of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ** (Romans 28-29), that as we continue to be conformed to the image of Jesus, we are able to hear clearly what is the will of God for us. And that is His will – to be conformed to the image of His Son, to be like Jesus, to emulate Him, to reflect Him in every way that we can.

So beloved, seven areas of scriptures that tell us what the general will of God is for us. So that when God says, here is something that I want you to do, we can do it, and we can be obedient to Him.

I want to end this message with a challenge to you and to me, asking the question: Am I saying yes to God and really meaning yes? Or do I sometimes say yes to God and then not listen to Him? Or even have I said, "I will do it, Lord," and maybe that thought has been burning in me and I realize I made a wrong choice, and I've not repented and turned around and done what He wanted me to do? Maybe today God is saying, "Would you do it? Would you place My will at the highest level of obedience in your life? would you follow My will? Would you be true citizens of the kingdom of God? Or would you just be wonderful sons and daughters, obedient sons and daughters of our Father who is in heaven. Amen.

Let's pray together.

Our heavenly Father, we acknowledge that there have been many times when we have disobeyed You. In fact, Lord, when we have outright said no to You or even said yes, and then not done it. Lord we are sorry, we confess that we have done wrong. Now Lord, to everybody to whom Your Spirit is speaking, and has spoken during the course of this service. Lord, we are being led to a place where we say, nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done, as Your Son responded. Lord we pray that You would stir us, fill us with Your Spirit to be able to not only do Your will, but to be able to do it joyfully. Lord, we ask that Your general will, as we are obedient to all of those areas, lead us to clearly understanding what the specific will is that You have for each one of us. Bring clarity, Almighty God, to our lives. We love You. It is a joy to serve You and to be able to, and to hear You call us to work in Your vineyard. We pray this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.