

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, the love You have shown for me is amazing. Keep me ever mindful of the cost of this love; the journey to Jerusalem, the sentence of death, the walk to Calvary and the nails in Yours hands. May I always know that resurrection power comes from Your sacrifice, Lord Jesus. AMEN

Prayer

All praise be to You, Lord God; we bless You. We know we cannot offer You anything which we have not first received from You, but in honour of all you have done for us, we bless You with our words and our deeds, our thoughts and our emotions. May every part of our being praise and bless Your holy name; thank You Lord: Alleluia!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Broken Families

Pray about the social pressures and conditions in your country which make it either attractive for men and women not to marry, or harder for them commit to marriage

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who are troubled and consider suicide*
- *Pray today for the ongoing civil strife in parts of Sri Lanka*
- *Give thanks for the gifts of life and joy and love.*

Meditation

(a prophecy)

Arrange church services in whatever style is appropriate.
But let Christ be at the centre, and not the world's agenda.

Use all kinds of music with which to praise and worship God;
But let the words you sing reflect the truth within God's Word.

Organise your church according to your commission;
But let the gifts of all be cherished and known and used.

Baptise people water, with love and joy and worship;
But let it speak of the grace of God and spiritual new birth.

Organise groups for prayer, fellowship and Bible study;
But let them not become merely private 'interest-groups'.

Allow your buildings to be used by people in the community;
But let the moral values of the Creator be your earthy guide

Live to the full as people and enjoy your fellowship in Christ;
But let there be no question about the Gospel imperative of love.

Bible Study - Matthew 21:28-32

²⁸ 'What do you think? A man had two youngsters; he came to the first and said, "Child, go and work in the vineyard today." ²⁹ He answered, "I will not", but later changed his mind and went. ³⁰ The father came to the second and said the same; and he answered, "Yes sir, I will"; but he did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did what his father wanted?' They said, 'The first.'

Jesus said to them, 'Amen, I tell you that the tax collectors and 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

prostitutes believed him. Even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'

Review

This brief parable and Jesus' comment about it is the first of three; the two sons asked to work in the vineyard vv28-32 (today's text); the parable of the absent landowner vv33-41; and the parable of the stone rejected by the builders vv42-46). They all follow on from the chief priest's confrontation with Jesus, and their failure to respond to Jesus' call for them to publicly accept the ministry of John the Baptist (21:15f.). In all of these parables Jesus severely criticises the official religion of His own people, and from the earliest days of the church they have been regarded as indicating Jesus' final rejection of Judaism and Judaism's rejection of Jesus.

However, this is not entirely true. Certainly, the leaders of Judaism rejected Jesus, but although Jesus spoke against them, He always left the door open for individuals to respond to Him. We must accept that Jesus did not merely reject Judaism, He fulfilled its God-given role and purpose in the Kingdom. In this light, it is best to read these parables as illustrating not so much the breakdown between Jesus and the Jews, but the contrast between those who believed in Jesus and those who did not.

The parable of two 'youngsters' This parable is relatively well known, and it reminds us a little of Luke's famous parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke15:11-32). It is usual for Bible translators to use the word 'sons' in this parable, but I have used different words, i.e. 'child', or 'youngster' (see v 28). This is because Matthew did not use the normal Greek word for a young 'son' ('uios'), but a word which meant a child just old enough to do some work in the household ('tekna'); hence my translation. The reason for this choice of words may have been because it was important for the parable that no favouritism be implied, and as we read this parable it is best to think of the children as two young brothers needing to be directed to do some work in a family business.

We all recognise the story, because people who say 'no I won't', and then say do what they have been asked, are the infuriatingly better option to those who say 'yes I will', and don't! This is the general point of our story, but whereas the actions of the second child were plainly wrong, the actions of the first demonstrate important Gospel themes. Firstly, the first child repented ('he changed his mind ...' 21:29) and secondly he did the father's will. These two themes are important in Matthew's Gospel, for repentance features strongly in Jesus' first sermon (4:17 - see also 3:8,11; 11:21; 12:24) and 'doing the father's will' is a significant later teaching theme (7:21, 8:2,6; 9:26).

We learn more about the parable from its setting, which was in a 'vineyard', a traditional if rather unflattering image of Israel in scripture. This theme links the parable with others in this part of Matthew (20:1-16 and 21:33-41), and in all three, the master was always looking for those who would work as instructed in the vineyard. In the light of this, the child who said yes but did no work represents the spiritually corrupt leaders of Israel, who paid lip service to God. The child who said 'no' and then did what was asked represents those prepared to repent and follow Jesus.

About Jews and Gentiles? Or just about chief priests and elders? This parable was clearly told by Jesus to embarrass the Jewish leaders so when they responded to Jesus' story with the obvious answer (21:31), they fell into the trap Jesus had set and condemned themselves. They had avoided this previously by not replying to Jesus' challenges (21:27) but they did not have the wit to see where this parable was heading. The trap they had earlier attempted to spring on Jesus (21:23) had finally sprung on them, and they had to bear the embarrassment of identifying themselves as those unwilling to do God's will. In

truth, the chief priests did not intend to address the issues of faith and authority Jesus presented them with because they did not recognise His authority.

And now, the consequences ... Having exposed the hypocrisy of the chief priests in front of the crowd (21:23), Jesus proceeded to drive home His point. Emphatically, He said 'Amen, I tell you ...', and pronounced that the lowest of all sinners would be welcomed into the Kingdom of God before the chief priests! What an insult this was, but they had drawn it on themselves. Tax collectors and prostitutes had shown the merit of repenting and following the 'way of righteousness' (21:32) in response to the message of John the Baptist, but the chief priests were not yet able to determine whether they believed John's message of repentance was from God (see yesterday's passage)! Jesus berated the chief priests and elders for being doubly agnostic to the challenge of John's life and ministry. They had not accepted his call to repent (21:32), and neither did they accept that what he had done was good in God's eyes ('even after you saw it, you did not change ...').

This, of course, is just the beginning of a series of confrontations between Jesus and the authorities, and we will find that no one could get past Jesus' ability to win arguments. But Jesus was not in Jerusalem to win arguments, and we should always remember that underneath the surface of the incidents was a threat to Jesus' life.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Can you give examples from your own life which illustrate the story Jesus told in this parable?
2. In what ways do people say 'yes' to Jesus but fail to do His will? Why is it that people do not easily recognise such sin?
3. Some would say that this passage advocates a 'Gospel of works'? Do you agree with this, or not.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The challenge to repent and to do the Father's will is very personal, but it depends on all kinds of factors. Each one of us must search our hearts to answer the question about whether we have faithfully responded to God's call as we should. However, either the company we keep or the state of our lives may condition our response. This is where things can become unclear, and our 'yes' and our 'no' become confused. Still, God continues to call us to repent and do His work. I am reminded of the story of the missionary who had prayed for years that someone would come and join her work. When asked why her prayers had apparently failed, she said, 'my prayers have not failed, those whom God has called have not responded'.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Take time to ask yourself whether you have indeed responded to what the Lord has asked you to do. This is no simple matter, and each of can only respond to this individually.*
- *What is it that God wants done in the world today, and what is He calling His people to do? Again, we may feel that the answer is straightforward, but we must be specific; people do not respond to a vague call!*