

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 1, 2023

TEXT: MATTHEW 21: 23-37

THEME: THE FATHER'S WILL

23 And when he 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?" **24** Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. **25** The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' **26** But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." **27** So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. **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.

In the name of Jesus:

How do you know when you are following or doing the will of God? It is a question that has vexed many a Christian. What exactly is the will of God and how do I know I am following the will of God? Is the will of God a feeling, or is

it something that is more concrete? Certainly you can look back on the events and times in your life and see how God has worked His will, just as the Apostle Paul told the church at Rome when he writes: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”

But how can you know for certain what the will of God is for you, in fact, what is His will for everyone now and going into the future? Jesus tells us in our text that we can know for certain: THE FATHER’S WILL.

To set the scene, the time is Holy Week, and Jesus has just entered the city of Jerusalem two days previous, on the back of a donkey to triumphant, earth shattering cries of the populace. Palm branches marked the road that Jesus traveled, and the people cried, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The religious leaders all witnessed this and realized that their control over the people, and the power over the religious affairs of the nation, were at risk. They found Jesus teaching in the Temple, and they asked Jesus a question: “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” To put it another way, they all asked in unison: “Jesus, who put you in charge? Who do you think you are?”

We are a lot like those religious leaders, aren't we? Because when push comes to shove, we like to think that we are in charge. We make the decisions, come what may. There are a great many times in our lives that we don't like others telling us what to do, and if we are honest, we don't like God telling us what to do, especially when what God declares in His Word goes against what we want. We would feel more comfortable if God would get with the times, and say to us that we should really conform our lives with popular opinion and with how the vast majority of people live their lives.

But, you see, God does not call you and me to be like the world and to live as the world lives. Jesus calls us to do the Father's will, not to conform our lives to popular opinion or conventional wisdom. And that is the point that Jesus is making in our text today. Those who believe in Jesus are called to follow Jesus.

That is why Jesus answers the religious leader's question with a question of His own: **"25** The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' **26** But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John

was a prophet.” **27** So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

The religious leaders loved power and the power and prestige that they possessed as a result of their position. They were in control, and didn’t want to share that power and prestige with anyone. That is why they answered Jesus in the manner that they did. They were afraid of the crowd and what other people thought. They understood the catch 22 that they were in. If they answered that John the Baptist wasn’t a prophet, well, they would be risking their lives because John was popular. And they didn’t agree with John and his doctrine, because John preached repentance, a change of direction in life, and these leaders didn’t want to change. They liked the status quo, they liked the way things were. And so they answered, “we don’t know.” And Jesus said, “if you don’t know, I am not going to tell you.”

But then Jesus proceeded to illustrate His point by telling a parable. “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.” Jesus then asks: “**31 Which of the two did the will of his father?**” They said, “The first.”

Why the first? Because the first son changed his mind, his attitude, and did what he was asked to do. He repented. He did the will of the Father. The other son? He paid lip service, saying one thing and doing the opposite.

Jesus' purpose, His mission and will in His life was to do the will of His Heavenly Father. Jesus said as much when He said, " My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (John 4). And this is what Jesus came to do, the will of the Father, just as Paul writes in our Epistle lesson for today: "Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Yet Jesus did not stay in the tomb, He rose from the grave and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, exalted and glorified by the Father for Jesus did the Father will by living, dying, and rising again for the salvation of sinners so that all sin would be forgiven.

Your sins are forgiven. They have been nailed to the cross and washed away in the Savior's blood. For "God our Savior, **4** desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. **5** For there is one God, and there is

one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, **6** who gave himself as a ransom for all," (1 Timothy 2).

Yes, God desires the salvation of every human being. Of every sinner. That is why Jesus makes this somewhat shocking statement: "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you." Tax collectors such as Zaccheus and the Apostle Matthew turned from their sinful lifestyle and repented, believing and following Jesus as His disciples. So too did the woman at the well, and Mary Magdalene, women who repented and trusted in Christ for forgiveness and eternal life.

So what does that mean for you and me? God loves the sinner. He loves you with an everlasting love, which is why He sent His only Son to be your Savior. God's will for you and me is that we recognize daily our sinfulness and how we have fallen short of the glory of God. His will is that you and I repent. Repent, to change our lives and our minds and turn to our loving Heavenly Father, who didn't spare His own Son but gave Him up as a sin offering for sinners, for you, and for me. For if we confess that we have sinned, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins all on account of Jesus.

As Christians, God now places us in situations and gives us opportunities where we can show our faith and witness to others about Jesus. This is what it

means in the parable to do the needed work in the vineyard. One of the problems with the Pharisees and religious leaders of that day is that they rejected the Gospel. They didn't think they needed a change of heart, they thought they were fine just the way they were. Yet Jesus called the Pharisees indeed every sinner including you and me, to have a change of heart. To repent. To believe in Jesus and then with faith in Him go to work in His vineyard, doing God's work in this messed up world that we live in. Changed by Christ's love, you and I are now empowered to do what the Father requests, sharing the message of Christ with others. The Lord presents to us many opportunities each and every day and throughout the week to care for and to share His love with those around us. And it is our joyful privilege to live as a follower of Jesus, to live as a Christian among those who don't know Jesus and His love.

The vineyard and the world we live in will always have troubles, trials and tribulations. But in repenting of our sins and turning to Christ, Jesus not only forgives us but also transforms us in our Baptism to live as His people. And in living for Christ, and sharing His love, we will be doing the will of the Father, to His glory and in the name of Christ.

Amen