

Matthew 21:23-32

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Matthew 21 verses 23 to 32.

! First of all, what's the occasion?

Jesus told this parable on a particular occasion. What was it? Verse 23 to 27. Look at that with me. It's a conversation.

It's a conversation between the Lord Jesus Christ and certain Jews. Which kind of Jews? They were a kind of civil leaders. We're called the elders of the people.

And they were the religious leader, the chief priests. The Lord Jesus, he camped into the temple, doesn't he? Verse 23, when he entered the temple. And the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching.

[1 : 09] They interrupted him. Previously, last week, we saw Jesus came into Jerusalem triumphantly. Do you remember that? He came in as king, riding on the foal of a donkey.

He was fulfilling the Old Testament, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah. And the whole city was enraptious. The whole city went crazy for the Lord Jesus. People were cutting down palm branches. People were taking off their coats and putting them on the floor. Because they welcomed King Jesus into Jerusalem. And then we find that he goes into the temple.

His father's house. And he goes into the temple and he finds people buying and selling. And on his own authority, he cleanses the temple. He casts the people out.

And now the next day, the moment the Lord makes an appearance in Jerusalem and begins his teaching, immediately he's confronted by the civil authorities. Immediately the religious leaders of the nation have had enough.

[2 : 14] And they have a question. And they've got nothing to say about his teaching. They've got nothing to say about what he's teaching them. They've got nothing to say about his life.

They've got nothing to say about his followers. But they have a question. Look at verse 23. Here's the question. As he was teaching, they came up to him and said, By what authority are you doing these things?

And who gave you this authority? Look at that question really carefully. Because that question in verse 23 is the question that enemies of the truth have asked constantly through church history. Whether they want to silence people they don't like. So think of the time of the Great Reformation, Martin Luther and all that. When the gospel in many ways was rediscovered.

And men began to preach it. And people began to be transformed by it. And what was the question that the Roman Catholic Church asked? They constantly asked.

[3 : 22] It was the same question. They asked this question. They said, by what authority are you doing this? And who gave you that authority? To stand outside the recognized official church, what are you doing?

And who do you think you are to be doing this? Who gave you the authority? Who gave you the authority? And that was the question which they tried to shut up the reformers with.

Now let's come into our own country. Let's come into England. The Reformation in England. And you think of the Puritan movement. You think how God moved in that century. And they are slung out of the church.

They are thrown out of the church. And the question that they are asked as they begin to preach is, who gave you the authority to do what you're doing? Where do you get it from?

By what authority do you think you can tell people about the scriptures? You're in the 18th century. Heroes like men like George Winfield and John Wesley.

[4 : 25] Daniel Rowlands. The church is in a terrible way. And God raises up these men. To preach the gospel. Women like the Countess of Hundenness.

Who's a great supporter of that. And they go out. They're not allowed in chapels and churches. They go out into the streets. And they preach the gospel. And what's the question that is put to them? By what authority are you doing these things?

And who gave you this authority? And here we are in the 25th century. And faithful churches. That are getting kicked out. Or having to leave the established denominations. And what's the question they're asked? Faithful churches that want to plant. What question are they asked by religion?

They're asked this question. By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority? They're trying to quiet yourself. And so what do religious leaders.

[5 : 26] Ask about churches. Very often. They don't ask. Are people being one to the Lord Jesus Christ? What good is being done? Are people being formed more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus?

Because they ask. What credentials have you got? They swore at our Lord Jesus. How did the Lord Jesus respond? The enemy wants him to admit something.

They want Jesus to admit. Actually I've not been sent by an authorised denomination. A recognised denomination. And the enemy wants Jesus to admit.

I've not come from some recognised institution. They're going to try and shut him up. So how does Jesus respond to this question? By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?

In Jesus' verse 24. Our Lord replies to their question with a question. With a question. Jesus isn't trying to avoid their question. We've seen lots of political leaders this week being interviewed.

[6 : 29] And have you noticed what they do? When they don't want to answer a question. They respond by asking a question back. Don't they? But that isn't what Jesus is doing. He's asking a question back.

Because it is the best and fullest way of replying to their question. And his question is quite simple. Verse 24. And I'll also ask you one question. And if you tell me the answer. Then I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

The baptism of John. Remember that? Where does it come from? Where does it come from? And they discussed it amongst themselves. If we say from heaven.

He will say to us. Why then did he not believe it? But if we say from man. Well we're afraid of the crowd. For we know they hold that he was a prophet. John the Baptist. Was he sent from heaven? Or was he self-appointed?

John the Baptist. Did God send him? Or is he just some upstart. Who decided that he wanted to preach. And he went ahead and did it. What's the answer? Is it perfect wisdom of the Lord Jesus?

[7 : 32] They couldn't deny. They could not deny that John the Baptist. Was heaven sent. But if they admitted it. They knew they'd be in trouble. Because John the Baptist. That man had said of Jesus.

Do you remember when he saw him? He said. Behold the Lamb of God. Who takes away the sin of the world. This man of. Said of Jesus. He said. Here is the one.

Who is preferred before me. Because he was. Before me. He said. I'm not even worthy. To tie this guy's sandals. I'm not even worthy.

To tie this guy's shoelaces. That's how wonderful. The Lord Jesus is. John said. He said of Jesus. I'll baptize you with water. But this guy.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. At the moment that they would admit. That John the Baptist. Had come from heaven. They would have to believe what he said. And therefore.

[8 : 27] They have to admit. That Jesus Christ. Was the Messiah. He was. God's King. The long awaited one. That we've sung of this morning. And so they were aware. Of the problem that was facing them.

In verse 25. They reason. They discuss amongst themselves. Saying. Well if we say from heaven. He will say to us. Why then do you not believe him? But if we say from man.

We're afraid of the crowd. Because they all know. Everyone knows. That John was a prophet. Said from God. And so they answered. Only Jesus. Verse 27. We don't know. We do not know. But Jesus said.

Well neither will I tell you. By what authority. I do these things. And so you see. The divine wisdom. Of the Lord Jesus. He doesn't fall. Into that trap. But he didn't stop there.

He now tells a parable. Which was specifically. Directed. To those different priests. To those people. People who knew the truth. But wouldn't own up to it. Because it would lead them. [9:27] To admitting that. Jesus Christ. Was the Messiah. And these people. Would not admit. To what they knew. Was true. But there were. Prostitutes. And there were.

Tax collectors. Who were twisted. Dishonest. Men. Who would. Admit. What they knew. To be true. So Jesus tells a parable.

To bring home this point. That's the occasion. And let's see the parable. Number two. The parable. From 28th to 22. The parable is about. Two sorts of people. There are some people. Whose action. Are better than their words. There are some people. Whose actions. Are better than their words. And they're represented. By the first son. But sadly.

There are some people out there. Whose words. Are better than their actions. And they're represented. By the second son. Now if you look at verse 28.

[10:22] You'll see both sons. They have the same father. Jesus is not teaching here. That God is the father. Of all people. That isn't the point of the parable. Don't make that mistake.

He's talking about. Two sets of people. Who at that time. Found themselves. In the Jewish community. There was a scam. It's beautiful. There were the prostitutes.

The cheating. And tax collectors. And then there were the religious leaders. Both of them. In the same Jewish nation. And that's what this parable is about. They both received the same command. You see it there in verse 28. It's a very fatherly command. Isn't it? Verse 28. A man had two sons. And he went to the first. And he said. Son. Go and work.

In the vineyard. Today. Today. Now when we see vineyard. What would we have to think? We've been through Matthew's gospel. What is that vineyard? That Matthew keeps talking about.

[11:21] That vineyard. It's a picture of the kingdom of God. We've already seen that. Repent. John the Baptist was preaching. Come to the Messiah. That was what John the Baptist was preaching.

Come to the Messiah. Come to Christ. Live under the government of God. That's not being a Christian. It's living with Christ as your ruler. Have the Holy Spirit of God. Living within you. Become a real heart subject of God. Go into the vineyard. And work for him. And we saw recently. Didn't we? That we become Christians. We come into the kingdom of God. To work for the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we want to do. To do something for Christ. And to do it now.

To do it today. To live for him. So it's the command. So here are two sets of people. They hear the same command. But they don't respond in the same way.

[12:16] In verse 29. Here's the first sentence. His actions are better than his words. His answer is really bad, isn't it? He says, doesn't he?

The father. Son. Son. Son. Son. Go into the vineyard. And work for me today. I will not go.

That is a bad answer, isn't it, children? That is not a good answer, isn't it? When your mum or dad say to you. Ethan, can you go and tidy your room?

I will not go. I can't imagine that gets a good response, does it? From your dad or mum. What do you think? It doesn't, does it? It doesn't go down well, does it, Anis?

Don't try that at home, alright? I will not go. The answer is really bad, he answered. But his actions were good. Afterwards, the student says he regretted it.

[13:18] And he went. The father of the son comes and says, go into my vineyard and work in my vineyard today. No, I will not. He's not a fellow making excuses. He's just bare-faced rude.

When his father speaks to him. There's a downright refusal. Like some of you. But then your second thoughts. And isn't that one of the most wonderful things?

About the good news of Lord Jesus. There are boys and girls. And there are young people. And there are men and there are women. Who are very, very unpromising.

But they come to something in the kingdom of God. That's great, isn't it? There are some people when they hear the gospel. They refuse it. And they're actually rude about it.

And then they change their mind. And they repent. And they obey. And they come into the kingdom. And they work. The son wasn't just sorry for what he said.

[14:28] He changed his mind. And he went into the vineyard. And that is what repentance is. Repentance is not just being sorry for what you've done.

Repentance is regretting what you've done. That you've done something that you shouldn't have done. Or you've not done something that you should have done. It is a changing of your mind about

it.

And that change of mind is seen in a changed life. And so this guy's life is changed. He forsakes his rebellion.

He stops saying no. He starts saying yes. And he gets to work in the vineyard. Didn't he deserve to be punished? Didn't he deserve to be thrown out of his father's house?

Didn't he deserve his father to chastise him? To disobey him completely? But he went to the vineyard.

[15:28] And here's the glory of the good news of the Lord Jesus this morning. That the vineyard was still open to him. It was still open to him. And he worked in the father's vineyard.

That is the grace and the kindness of God. That is the father's blessing. And so some of us. You refuse and you refuse. And sometimes you refuse God spitefully.

And stubbornly. And then you repent. And you change your mind. And you forsake your place of rebellion.

And you go back on your sinful words. And you come to the kingdom. And you come to Christ. And you find that the door is open. And you come in.

And you may work for the king. Let's look at the second son. Look at this 30. These words are better aren't they? He went to the other son. And he said the same thing.

[16:28] He said son go work in my vineyard today. And the second son answered. I go sir. But did not go.

Now all those who hear the gospel of good news. Hear the same gospel. People in this room. You hear the same commands. You hear the same instruction.

You receive the same encouragement. And so here is a man. He hears the gospel. He hears the command. And he is very very respectful. And his words are very submissive.

Look what he says. He says I go sir. I'm on my way. You count on me. Like so many who promise so much. He has got a nice spirit about it.

But nothing comes of it. That is because. In this man's life. In some people's lives. Saying and doing.

[17:29] Are two different things. That's something that God absolutely hates. And that's one of the main points of this parable. It's interesting in the Hebrew Old Testament.

Saying and doing are the same verb. Now actually. Saying or doing are not separate things. In the mind of God. But saying and doing.

But they are separate things. In this guy's life. He said he would go. But he did not go. Can any parallel be simpler than this? The point of the parallel is this.

Will it be real obedience? Or will it be just words? Which will it be? Real obedience.

Or just words? We've seen the occasion. We've seen the parable of 30. That's the point. The real point is in verse 31. The point is brought home.

[18:28] To that original audience. By another question. Look at verse 31. Which of these two. Did the will of his father? What do you think children?

Was it the first son? Or the second son? That did the will of the father? What do you think? How do you think? The first son isn't it?

The youngest person here. Can understand the point of the parable. It was the first son. The one who said no. But changed his mind and went. He was the one. That fulfilled the will of his father.

It's a really obvious question. One was rude. The other was a liar. They were both faulty. Weren't they? But which one was the better one?

Which one was the least at fault? The answer is easy. And they found it out. You see in verse 31. Which of the two did the will of his father?

[19:26] They said the first. Why? Because his actions. Were better than his words. His end.

Was better than his beginning. No one with any common sense. Could miss the answer this morning. The right answer is as obvious. As those on your face. And the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then takes up the right answer. And he applies it to the discussion. That's going on at the minute.

To their in Jewish society. To those prostitutes. And twisted. Cheating tax collectors. They were the ones that were outside.

Of organised religion. Now let's think back for a minute. To Jewish society. Where did the kind of children go to school? Synagogues.

What was the local community centre? Synagogues. What was the local law court? A society? Synagogue. What was the centre of society? Synagogue. Everything revolved around the synagogue.

[20 : 27] The religious place. And so if you were outside organised religion. You were outside society in lots of ways. You were an outcast.

You were not one of the insiders. You were one of the outsiders. You were a complete outcast. If the synagogue threw you out. And said you're no longer welcome here. You really were a social outcast.

And so hear words. Social outcast. And along comes John the Baptist. And he doesn't preach in the synagogue. He doesn't go to IBC and preach. He goes out into the deserts to preach.

He wants a horse to get in hell. And they hear him preach. And the people. The normal people. They're sorry for their sins. And they're smitten. And now hearts.

And they break their hearts. And they repent. And they prepare for the coming of Christ. And when Christ comes. They come to him. But at the same time.

[21 : 26] You're the Jewish religious leaders. And oh they're so religious. They've got rules in their religion. About everything. Rules which they keep. Rules about what you should wear on your head.

Rules about what shoes you should wear. And there are rules about how far you should walk on a certain day. Rules about which food you should eat. Rules about who you should speak to.

And who you shouldn't speak to. Rules about how you introduce. And how you say goodbye. Rules about how you walk downstairs. And how you walk upstairs. And there are rules about everything. Absolutely everything.

They are so religious. But when John the Baptist comes along. They're going to hear him out of curiosity. They can't believe it. They've got to hear this man.

It's kind of a religious phenomenon. But they don't recognise that they have any sin. And they don't prepare for the coming of the Messiah. And so when the Messiah comes.

[22 : 29] They don't actually recognise him. And they don't come to him. And they're filled with religious words. They sing their religious words. They say their religious words.

They're filled with promise. I go sir. I go sir. I go sir. But when the Savior comes. They don't go to him. And they're hypocrites.

Hypocrites are now saying. They don't know if John the Baptist was sent by God or not. You should have known. You should have known said Jesus. In verse 32. You should have known verse 32.

That John was an outstanding example of righteousness. He did good amongst the worst kind of people. It's not the proof that the Lord had sent him.

Jesus is saying in verse 32. Your problem is that you're not willing to admit that God sent him. And so you have tax collectors.

[23 : 32] You have prostitutes. Who are represented by the first son. And you've got the Jewish civil and religious leaders represented by the second son. I hear these people.

They are not promising at all. They are rebellious. And they are rude. But they are the ones that enter the kingdom of God. Because they repent. I hear of the ones who are very very promising. And they are filled with religion. And with good works. But they don't go into the kingdom. When it's preached. They go the other way. Now Jesus made his point.

And his point I hope is not lost on you or me or us. Because first of all here is a parable that holds out immense encouragement. Immense encouragement to you this morning.

If you will repent. If you will say. I'm sorry Lord. And I've lived my life for myself.

[24 : 37] And I've lived without you as Lord. And I know that's wrong. And I want to change. But I can only change Lord. If you help me by the power of your spirit. And the Lord Jesus Christ has come to enable me to change.

And has taken my sin. It's immensely encouraging. God speaks to you this morning. Through his word.

He speaks to congregations. He speaks to every congregation when the Bible is opened. And explained. And through the Bible. God tells every man and every woman. And every boy.

And every girl in church this morning. To go into the vineyard. And God is telling you. This Sunday morning. Right now. Come into my kingdom.

Come to Christ. Live under the government of God. God. And come and work for me. And be a member of that new race.

[25 : 35] And that new kingdom. And some of you this morning. You are flatly refusing to obey. But others of you.

Are promising to obey. But frankly. You are doing nothing about it. What your lips say. Is very very good. But that's not matched.

By what's going on in your life. And so the parable speaks to us. Do it isn't it? Now first of all. Are words to those who flatly refuse.

Okay. To those who just say no. The gospel tells you. That God is infinitely willing. To receive. The worst of sinners. You flatly refuse. You say no. But if you will repent of your sin.

[26 : 34] In spite of all that you've done. And all that you've said. And all that you've thought. However unpromising you have been. If you leave the place of rebellion. And you turn your back.

On those awful words. And thoughts. And you will turn. And you will come to the door. And you will find that that door is open.

And you may go in. And even today. Today you can enter into all the privileges of the gospel. And you can find work to do.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And purpose in living. And the door is open this morning. If you will repent. The door is wide open. If you will repent. And that's the gospel.

We're not Buddhists. We're not Buddhists. We say. When you go to such and such a temple. And give such and such an offering. And you do such and such. A journey. And you can get in. We're not Muslims.

[27 : 35] Who say. Go to Mecca. And do this. And don't do that. And dress like this. And don't dress like that. We are people who are saying to you. Whatever you've done. However bad you've been.

And however rude you've been to God. And however spiteful your words have been. Whatever it is. And however long you've done it. If you will turn free from it. There's a place in the kingdom for you. There's bread and wine at the table. Because of the mercy of God. Our assurance of pardon was what Christ Jesus came into this world to what?

To save sinners. He brought the punishment. Which has come for sinners. He suffered the agony of the punishment. Which sinners deserved. He's not then going to turn you away is he?

This is great news. For the sinner who turns. All things have passed away. All things have become new. And Jesus Christ is emphasising to you. How wide the door is this morning.

[28 : 38] And repentance is the way in. Now a word is there. To give lip service to all this. And your doctrine. Your doctrine is correct. And you can't fault.

I can't fault you when you talk about the Christian faith. And your ethics are correct. And no one can fault you when you talk about Christian behaviour. But are you really giving up on your sins?

And that's the question isn't it? The challenge the word of God puts. Because good words. Even good words. Even godly words. Even true words. Even prayerful words. Disgust God.

If they're not followed up by actions. Which match themselves. But if you will repent. Even of that sin. And you will turn from your hypocrisy.

You will find that that door is open. Amazingly. Because the Bible says. The Bible says.

[29 : 41] If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just. And will forgive us our sins. And cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Finally a word about today. Can you just look at verse 28.

The father comes to their son. And he says. Son go and work in the vineyard. A little word today. Today. When will God meet with a rebellious sinner?

When will God. Forgive the person who said nice words. But has not decided to back them up with right actions. When does God promise to meet with you?

Only today. Only today. God has no promises. To deal graciously.

And kindly with a sinner tomorrow. Or next week. Or next year. Only today. The person you are. Is the person you are today. Isn't it? And the need you have.

[30 : 42] Is the need that you have today. And delay is a terrible thing. It is the devil's tactic. Isn't it? For people who grew up in churches.

It's the devil's tactic. Tomorrow. When I'm older. When I'm old. Later. And the devil will try and scold you. If you can. But God always.

Always. Always. Always. In terms of today. And if there is a time. To. To foresee rebellion. To stop going your own way.

It's today. It's now. And if there is a time. To come into the kingdom. It is now. And if there is a time. To give yourself to Jesus Christ. It is now. And if there is a time.

To live under his government. It is now. And God makes a promise. To receive you. Now. But he doesn't make any promises. Beyond that. And so I want to say something.

[31 : 39] Just a Christian siphonish. Because I think that same truth. Is for us today. Is that if we've got something. In our life. That needs sorting out. And many of us have.

God is pleased to deal with it today. But he demands. And he requires. That you give attention. To that right now. That this whole question.

Of words which are spoken. Which are not followed up. By the actions. Which match those words.

That is to be dealt with. Now. Today. This very hour. The parable is very brief.

The message. Is very brief. Life. Is very brief. And so what life will it be. A life of.

Lip service. Or service. Let's pray.