



St. John the Baptist was a “man sent from God” to prepare the way of the Lord (Jn 1:6, 23). He preached repentance from evil works and provided a ritual baptismal ceremony for those who would receive his message, turn away from sin, and pledge obedience to God. The chief priests and elders of the people did not avail themselves of John’s baptism. Many, “the crowd,” regarded John as a prophet. Jesus challenged the chief priests and elders with the question, “Where was John’s



baptism from? Was it of heavenly or earthly origin?” They refused to answer. This is the backdrop for the parable in this week’s Gospel.

The parable is simple yet devastating for the chief priests and elders. In the parable a father has two sons. Both are asked to work in the vineyard. The first says no, but later has a change of mind and goes to work in the vineyard. The second initially says yes, but in fact, does not do what his father asked. Jesus concludes with a vigorous indictment against the chief priests and elders:

“Which of the two did his father’s will?” They answered, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.” (Matthew 21:31–32)

Yes, this is a massive blow to the chief priests and elders who had said ‘yes’ to God, but now will not obey. At the same time, it is good news for the tax collectors and prostitutes who had said ‘no’ to God, yet now are willing to change! The question is, how does this apply to us?

I think it is safe to say we can all relate to both sons in the parable. We have all said ‘yes’ to our heavenly Father, yet failed to follow through; likewise, we have said ‘no,’ but by the grace of God and a change of heart have obeyed in the end.

The good news is, you are reading this little reflection right now which means you are searching for truth; you are searching for God. Today, our heavenly Father invites you to work in His vineyard. What does that mean? Yes, it means following the way of righteousness by rejecting sin and being obedient to the commandments, but more than that, it means embracing a new attitude—the attitude of Christ Jesus. The Second Reading describes what it means to say ‘yes’ to God and go to work in His vineyard:

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but (also) everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:1-11).

Now THAT is a tall order! But, how beautiful! The good news for us who are sinners (tax collectors, prostitutes, etc.) is we can still have a change of heart; we, by God’s grace, can repent and begin anew to work in the vineyard. Our past “no” to God can be changed today — “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 4:7).

Your Servant in Christ,
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