

# Who did his fathers will?

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[ 0 : 00 ] You'll find our text this evening in the first portion of Scripture read, that is the passage in the 21st of Matthew. Matthew chapter 21. And particularly the words in verse 31.

Verse 31. Whether of them twain did the will of his father. Whether of them twain did the will of his father.

Now, the short parable from which our text is taken tonight is perhaps one of the easiest parables of our Lord Jesus Christ to understand.

We find ourselves sometimes as we read through these parables of his, pulled up by something or other that we hadn't seen before. And we may remain in puzzlement for a considerable time before we get an explanation that satisfies us.

That's not so likely to happen when we read a parable like this. It's one of the simplest lessons that our Lord ever taught.

[ 1 : 18 ] You know, note again how this incident began. Jesus had been teaching in the temple.

And his teaching was proving attractive. And influential, mightily and savingly influential.

As they listened, some of those poor social outcasts who gathered to him. They were plucking up fresh courage. They had been ostracized for many years.

They couldn't think of any future at all for them. They were beyond redemption as it seemed. They were reminded by the Pharisees and scribes that the law condemned the manner of life that they had been following.

And that the law could do nothing else but condemn. But this was something new. Someone who was speaking as one having authority and not of the scribes.

[ 2 : 27 ] And someone who had a note in his teaching that was quite different. From the hard. Almost callous.

Teaching of the Pharisees and the scribes with their self-righteousness. Here was a teacher with a heart. A teacher with a message, obviously.

But a teacher with a heart that matched the message. He wasn't concerned just with teaching him a lesson. He was concerned by their need of the salvation that he alone could impart.

And so it is not surprising that the outcasts took to him. But the Pharisees and scribes didn't like it.

Not one bit. They made it a ground of complaint against this new teacher. Who had come among them. encouraging Pharisees and encouraging publicans and harlots to gather to him.

[ 3 : 50 ] They wouldn't do that. They were more righteous than to think of such a thing. And if they didn't actually say it, they said in their hearts, well, a man is known by the company he keeps.

Or a proverb that would be the equivalent of that in their time. And I'm sure there was one. So they came to him feeling very righteous in their advance.

And demanded of him, what authority doest thou with these things? And who gave thee that authority? Jesus took his own way with them.

He didn't tell them just in simple words. What his authority was for doing those things. And who gave him that authority.

Because he knew that they knew that they were blinding their eyes to the evidence. So the way that he took them with them was to make them answer their own question.

[ 5 : 08 ] And he said to them, in effect, before I answer your question, will you please answer one for me? It's about John the Baptist. You're asking about authority.

Well, what about John the Baptist? By what authority did he work? What authority lay behind his teaching? Now that was a poser.

And they saw it. They were divided about John the Baptist. Some, like themselves, would have been very reluctant to say that John the Baptist was anything but just an ordinary man.

Or that he had any authority beyond that that ordinary men could give him. And that was a difficult thing. If we say of men we fear the people.

And of course, the alternative was if we say of God then they put themselves into a corner. Because he would then say why did you not then believe him?

[ 6 : 20 ] You rejected his teaching. And yet you say it was of God. Why did you not then believe him? So they decided that they were saying either.

And all that they hoped for now was to make their escape as quickly and as quietly. And we as little lost of faith as possible. And they said we cannot tell.

And Jesus in reproof of that hypocrisy said neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. there no doubt I would have been glad if he had left it there.

But you know he loved those men too and wanted to win them. And that more than anything else was what lay behind this parable.

There was a parable of rebuke which is quite true. But he wanted them to look at themselves. Have a good hard look at themselves. Know the kind of the kind of men they were.

[ 7 : 33 ] And respond to his message. You know just like that passage in the parable of the prodigal son.

The father rejoiced over the repentance of the prodigal. He wanted that elder brother too. wanted him so much that he left the feast and came out and entreated him.

And even though the son spoke disrespectfully to him saying no what's this these many years do I serve thee neither at any time have I transgressed thy commandment.

And thou never gaveest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends but when this thy son and he won't say my brother but thy son has come for he vowed thy living with the father that was killed for him the fatid khan and still the father persisted son whatever with me and all that I have is mine.

What happened to the elder brother were not told. At that point the curtain drops and I've seen the festivity and joy the lesson is the man who had gone so far astray is at the very centre of rejoicing whereas the man who hadn't strayed from home and was boasting about all that he had done for the father and in his interest was still sulking in the darkness outside.

[ 9 : 25 ] But it's a new lesson for us all. in these two parables and I think indeed we might regard these parables as companion parables companion pictures if you like.

You have the same characters a father representing the same person the person of God and you have two sons in each of the parables one who went very far astray and the other who didn't at least not by men's standards and the other who remained at home toiling away at his father's work so it seems and these characters represent the same people because both parables as you would have noticed were addressed to the same audience murmuring Pharisees and scribes who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others and here again you have

Jesus putting a question at the end of his parable that went to the very heart of the matter whether of the twain did the will of his heart let's think of that tonight and see how we come into these companion pictures so I want to speak first of all of the son who said that he would or rather the son that said that he wouldn't and yet did listen to him a certain man had two sons and he came to the first and said some go work today in my vineyard and he answered and said I will not but let her thought supervene after he afterwards repented and went now that's just the prodigal son that's just his attitude to his father he's not going to serve his father he wants to get away on his own live his own life give me the portion of goods that falleth to me and when he got what he wanted he went into the far country and wasted his substance with the riotous living yes but again that wasn't the end of it he came home now these were the publicans and sinners that the

Pharisees and scribes were despising they were coming home and those formalists didn't like it and they couldn't admire and couldn't follow a teacher who would receive them and help them no no that wasn't their attitude to these wretched people Jesus brings that out in another of his parables which you will find in the 18th chapter the two men that went up to the temple at the hour of prayer the one a publican the other a Pharisee two classes again and the Pharisees prayed thus with themselves God I thank thee that I'm not as other men are then he went into details and then he took up a particular case he saw the

Pharisee yonder obviously in distress beating upon his breast and he knew what that meant perhaps he didn't hear his words but he knew by his action what frame of mind he was in God been merciful to me a sinner and yet Jesus tells us this man went down to his house justified his sinners he confessed sinners rather than the other man who went up not indeed to pray he had nothing that he wanted to ask of God he just wanted to tell God about himself whatever good man he was he went down to his house justified too be quite sure of that but his justification came from no higher authority than himself he justified himself but the publican who condemned himself went down to his house justified by the one who had the right and the authority to justify just that very authority that they were questioning and doubting let's get back to this man who said

[ 15 : 32 ] I will not yet afterwards repented and went he's blameworthy very blameworthy there is no excuse for his rudeness request had come to him from his father and quite evidently a good father and a request that comes from a loving parent is surely more binding than a request proceeding from almost anybody else the Jews were still in the days of Malachi although they were in a sorely backslidden state at that time they were still professing that there were the children of God and God took them up with their own estimate of themselves and said if I be a father where is mine honor is it a filial attitude that you have toward me how do you call me father and yet deny me the service that

I request from you so you see his sin that aggravation the request did not come from a stranger and it certainly didn't come from a tyrant from one whose conditions of service would be oppressive it came from a father a loving father and yet he said I will not notice this too what the nature of the request was it was for a service that really had to be given priority at that particular time go work today in my vineyard now you know how much a day may mean in a vineyard vineyard work has to be done in vineyard time it's got to be done when the grapes are ready for gleaning if you give priority to other things then you're not going to get the yield of the vineyard at least you're not going to get it in its best condition so you see it had that urgency too it was the request of a father and it was a request for a service that was urgently required and he said I will not yes but let us never forget the end of the story that wasn't the end he afterwards repented and went oh how that must have warmed the hearts of the publicans and sinners who were standing by in a penitence in a hopelessness until he began to speak they had been disgraced and repulsed by the religious leaders by those cold formal caries and scribes the men who fought with

Jesus when they saw him passing through the streets of Jericho with Zacchaeus the publican look they said he's going to be a guest with another sinner we wouldn't do that they didn't say but it's implied they said it in their hearts wouldn't it be wonderful if someday it was announced and announced on high authority that this race had died out what a wonderful place the church of God would be if that cold ritualistic formalism was taken out of the hearts of the people and they remembered what the master's mission really was when the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost

God give us that spirit so then the other son the son who said that he would and didn't listen again and he came to the second and said likewise and he answered and said I go sir but alas that's not the end of it he went not and yet to begin with he seems to be in complete contrast to the other son that's the way to speak to a father that's the way to meet his request for service I go sir indeed his compliance with his father's request was even more hearty than comes out in our translation you notice that the word go is in italics which means it's not in the original literally translated it is what he said was

I sir very ready response that's what it indicates I my brother may have disappointed me and insulted me but I'm not going to do that the first one was better than his word but the second one was worse than his word he went not and that I say again is just a fantasy there is a profession of service in what this man was saying just as there was in what the elder brother said Lord he's many years do I serve thee I haven't been wasting thy time or thy substance the way that my younger brother is doing these many years do I serve thee but the service wasn't all that it seemed it was the service of the self righteous formalist right you and in both cases remember all the time that

[ 23 : 10 ] Jesus is talking to Pharisees and scribes and addressing this particular part of the parable and oh what an exact picture you have of the Pharisee and of the scribe in our Lord's words they weren't ashamed of their religion they were proud of it they liked to be known as religious men they made a great display of it all when they did an arm to send a trumpeter before them so that everybody would see what generous people they were when they made their prayers they didn't go into the secret places our Lord directed no no that was not for them they went to the street corner people were coming this way and the people were coming that way and when people are always passing and seeing and hearing and do and the man at his prayers was saying yes I'm making it

I'm building up my reputation as a man of great piety they'll go on their way feeling the better for having heard me but they didn't they didn't nobody benefits from former religion let me this profession of regard for the law that's how the Pharisees speak I go sir I'm not suggesting for a moment that all the Pharisees were hypocrites although that was the character in general that Jesus gave them there were some Pharisees who were very honest men Phariseeism came into existence as a protest against prevalent laxity in religion these people wanted people to obey the law more strictly not to play with it to take it seriously to make it bare upon their lives there were men like that

Nicodemus have been one you remember and what about all of Tarsus us touching the righteousness that is in the law blameless and he was by his own standards he wasn't professing one thing and doing another by his own standards he was unknowing it now sincerely concerned for religion and for the law we can never meet the requirements of God in that way we can give all our diligence to the kind of religion that finds favor with ourselves but it doesn't commend us to

God what a dangerous thing self righteousness is then see it again in the case of these men who found for good Jesus during our Lord's earthly ministry they questioned his authority just as they were doing at this particular time when he spoke the parable to them and they kept on questioning it because he kept on affirming it and in the end they raised him up on the accursed tree of Calvary because he kept on affirming it declaring that he was the son of God declaring that he was sinless and that he had come into this world for this very purpose to seek and to save what was lost Paul sees it all now he tells the

Philippians you remember of the things wherein he used to glory and oh how proudly was of those things he he was he was he was he was his zeal for the law that made a persecutor of him that turned him against Christ for the arresting word of the master so Saul saw why persecutest thou me he was opposing the crowning purpose of God in the revelation of the gospel and in Paul surely you have an instance of the elder brother turning from a dead religion to a living one afterwards repenting and truly going what things were gained to me I counted lost for

[ 28 : 56 ] Christ God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world and lastly the son who said that he would and did I grant you that comparison in our text is between two sons whether of the twain did the will of his father but there was a number even though you don't read about him in the gospel story and who was the third son the son who said that he would and did who was he who could he be but the one who spoke the parables

Jesus himself did he belong to this family nobody came into it that's the glory of the incarnation he came into it John sees the marvel of it all in that amazing opening passage of his gospel in the beginning was the word and he's talking about a person not just an operance a verbal operance in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and then he personalizes the word he shows us how that eternal word the son of

God came into the family that he wanted to save to bring us the epistle to the Hebrews says many sons to glory the word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory is of the only begotten of the father full of grace and of truth the law came by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ this although this third son the one who came into the family of mankind who took bone of bone and flesh of flesh and was made in the likeness of men although he was above the law he made himself subject to the law because he had to deal with the law in saving his people he who knew no sins is

God was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him yes this is a perfect example you'd rather no doubt be the first son who afterwards repented and went then the second son who said I go so I didn't and yet neither of these sets before us the perfect example it is this third son to whom our eyes must be directed for us Peter reminds us he not only died for our sins but he left us an example that we should follow his steps it is a rough road that he had to take in the world but as Andrew

Bono so beautifully puts it he walked all the way from Bethlehem to Calvary without a single stumble and that becomes quite clear throughout the Gospels think of him a child of twelve in among the doctors of the law in Jerusalem his parents seeking for him son why hast thou thus dealt with us we were looking for you I was at the disordered me wish he not that I must be about my father's business I said I go and I've come I said to do thy will I take delight O thou my God that art yea that most holy law of thine I have within my heart and that's what I'm doing here remember two of the disciples found him sitting and talking with a woman of Samaria at least found him after he had been talking with her and they had with them the food which they had gone to purchase for her and they said master eat and he said can you imagine his face can you and he answered

[ 34 : 59 ] I have meat to eat but he know not of they didn't understand and he knew they didn't understand so he explained my meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work I said I go and I've come and I'm going on to the very end remember too there's agony in the garden father if it be possible let this cup pass from me nevertheless not mine but thy be done and he went on to do the father's will recall too that when Peter struck out at the high priest servant and wounded him when they were arresting his master put up thy sword again in his place the cup that my father has given me shall

I not drink it I said I go and I found the son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost and I am going to finish and just when the shadow of the cross was descending upon him when he offered his high priestly prayer father glorify thy son the time has come glorify thy son that thy son also may glorify thee I have glorified thee in the earth I have finished yes it was as good as done nothing could break down now the fiery test was over the surrender was complete and then on the cross the last earth cried with a loud voice because it was meant for a world of lost men and women in all the ages it is finished he said

I go and he came and he finished that work that was given him to do I can't resist telling you that story which I'm sure is familiar to most of you because it's told by Hudson Taylor and Hudson Taylor tells how he entered into the comfort of the gospel and the assurance of salvation remember perhaps how on Sabbath day for lack of anything better to do and desiring to do something seemly and pious he took up a little tract which was entitled The Finished Work of Christ and he tells us the effect that the reading of the tract had upon him I saw that since the work was now finished there was nothing for me to do about to fall down before him accept his gift and praise him forever more and that my dear friends is all that's left to us not all the cold toiling of the

Pharisees and of the scribes not the building up of our reputation of piety and self righteousness for ourselves not that bring no more bare oblations that's not what I want come now let us reason together say the Lord for your sins be as spar that shall be white as snow there is power in the blood to deal with the deepest dye of sins publicans sinners parlors every mother of transgression the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanse us from all sin so this sabbath evening I suggest to you that when we all go home and before we close our eyes and sleep the night we fall down again before

God and if it's not falling down again before God that will be the first falling down before God in the acceptance of the gospel and let us praise him for such entail yourself for evermore let us pray Lord our God what shall we render to thee for all thy benefits toward us verily thou hast done great things for us for all we are glad though for it's the mouths of thy people who laugh to their tongue with melody they said among the heathen the Lord has done great things for them and they themselves affirm the testimony the Lord has done great things for us whence joy to us has brought may the melody of salvation be heard where we dwell and may rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over penitent sinners throughout thy kingdom tonight for thy name is amen amen you