

Jesus said: **"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard. 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted? "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."**

### What do you think?

I get nervous when Jesus asks that question, because I usually dig a hole for myself with my answer, and that's just what the Chief Priests, Elders and Pharisees did with theirs.

**"What do you think?"** asks Jesus. A man had two boys. He asked one to get up off the couch and go and pick some grapes. "Nup" came the reply. "It's not gonna happen", "Don't want to", **"I will not"** he said to his dad. But later he changed his mind and went out to work. First sons are like that - I know, I am one of them! We don't always want to do things and are happy to say we don't feel like it. But sooner or later duty and guilt or respect for authority gets the better of us and off we go, we do what we're told. We do what is "right". We can be demanding, picky, and tend to be the rule makers, parent pleasers and tradition keepers. Many of us pastors are first-born sons!

Later on the dad found his other son and asked him to go and pick some grapes too. "OK", "Yes dad, anything for you sir, I'll get out there right away!" **"I will sir"** he politely replied. But that's as far as he got. He never got to the vineyard. Second and third sons can be like that. They usually do the opposite of the older brother whose shadow they have lived in. They learn that you can say "yes" to please dad but if you wait til he's left the room you don't actually have to do anything. You can stay on the couch.

**"What do you think?"** Asks Jesus. **"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"** Seems like a "no-brainer". We would probably have to say with the Pharisees **"The first."** It has to be the one who ends up doing what his father asked even if it didn't start out that way. Better than saying you're "gonna do" something you never get around to!

Jesus went along with their answer and he said to them, **"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."**

That hurt. It hurts the Pharisee in us, the person who thinks he is saying yes to God but is trusting more in self-righteousness than the righteousness God wants to give us in Christ. The Pharisees thought they were role models to everyone just as we Christians sometimes like to think we are role models to everyone else too. We might grumble a bit but at least we try to do some of what God asks. But Jesus holds up the tax collectors and prostitutes as role models to pious church people – priests, elders and leaders and people like us. He points us not to their lifestyle, but to their reaction to God's call, his call to repent. Their lifestyles had said "no" to God's will in all sorts of ways but when John the Baptist told them that forgiveness and a new start were on their way from God and he called them to get off the couch and come and be dunked in the muddy Jordan and walk out changed people with changed thinking and lives, and when he pointed them to Jesus who would take away the sin of the world, many of them responded, and Jesus said they were walking into the Kingdom ahead of those who had heard God's call to repentance, his call to receive forgiveness and to turn and change direction, but **"even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."**

The Pharisees walked right into the hole they had dug for themselves and so do we whenever we become self-righteous and don't respond to the "way of righteousness" that God freely gives us that is in Christ alone and calls for honesty, repentance, and trust in his forgiveness that leads to a change of heart and mind and life.

So, what do you think?

Who was the obedient son?

Who is the obedient one here today?

Where do you see yourself in this story?

Was anyone really obedient? Is anyone here really obedient? One said "no" to his father's face and the other said no behind his back! Who hasn't said "no" to God's will for our lives in some way this week? Who hasn't said "no" and only grudgingly done what's right but our heart wasn't in it? And who hasn't said "yes, I'm gonna change, gonna be different, gonna be more holy" and then been nothing remotely holy, remaining a spiritual couch potato! Who hasn't left church after mouthing one of our liturgical confessions that asked God to *"increase our knowledge of your will and make us obedient to your word"* or said "yes" to the question *"do you intend with the help of the Holy Spirit to strive daily to live a holy life even as Christ has made you holy"* but then went home and made no effort to change anything?

Our heavenly Father has a will for our lives. It's not open to debate. He calls them commandments, and they cover our thinking and behaving towards him and his word, authority figures, money, sex and relationships. He calls us to go out and live for him in the world, especially to love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us on the cross, and to serve as Philippians chapter 2 reminded us again today. He calls us to go and work in his vineyard gathering people to Christ.

Will we say "Amen brother, praise the Lord!" but then go home and sit on the spiritual couch? Will we do it eventually but out of guilt, duty or fear or God's authority? Or will our repentance this morning be genuine, even if imperfect. Will we say "yes Lord I need and thank you for your forgiveness for my disobedience. I thank you for what Jesus did when he obeyed you and died for me. I know you want that to change me so I can live better for you. I mean it, but I need your help to attempt to do it. Help me because of your grace to me to say "yes" to you more often and to mean it and do it".

God wants us to hear his call in this story to be honest about all our disobedience rather than pretend or act as if we are the obedient ones, and he wants us to come and be forgiven by Christ, the storyteller and the only truly obedient son, who St Paul reminded us today humbled himself, rolled up his sleeves and did what we were all supposed to do, and then was **"obedient to death, even death on a cross"** (Philippians 2:8). Jesus pointed the church people and he points us to those prostitutes and tax collectors who did just that. They were ahead of many church people in God's eyes not because of the dramatic change in lifestyle that impressed God but because they were honest about their need for forgiveness and change and looked to God for it.

Most of us love all our sons and daughters, the ones who end up doing what we want and those who say they will but don't. We persevere with them and we forgive them and we keep hoping for change just as our parents did with us. So does our heavenly Father. He gives us this weekly opportunity to say sorry, to be forgiven, and to say and then show we want his help to change.

So, **"What do you think?"** Jesus firmly but lovingly asks us again today. About the sons, about the story, about his conclusion, and about God's call to you to repent? More importantly, what are you going to "do" with God's call to you today?