

MATTHEW 21:23-32 THE MESSAGE

True Authority

²³ Then he was back in the Temple, teaching. The high priests and leaders of the people came up and demanded, “Show us your credentials. Who authorized you to teach here?”

²⁴⁻²⁵ Jesus responded, “First let me ask you a question. You answer my question and I’ll answer yours. About the baptism of John—who authorized it: heaven or humans?”

²⁵⁻²⁷ They were on the spot and knew it. They pulled back into a huddle and whispered, “If we say ‘heaven,’ he’ll ask us why we didn’t believe him; if we say ‘humans,’ we’re up against it with the people because they all hold John up as a prophet.” They decided to concede that round to Jesus. “We don’t know,” they answered.

Jesus said, “Then neither will I answer your question.

The Story of Two Sons

²⁸ “Tell me what you think of this story: A man had two sons. He went up to the first and said, ‘Son, go out for the day and work in the vineyard.’

²⁹ “The son answered, ‘I don’t want to.’ Later on he thought better of it and went.

³⁰ “The father gave the same command to the second son. He answered, ‘Sure, glad to.’ But he never went.

³¹⁻³² “Which of the two sons did what the father asked?”

They said, “The first.”

Jesus said, “Yes, and I tell you that crooks and whores are going to precede you into God’s kingdom. John came to you showing you the right road. You turned up your noses at him, but the crooks and whores believed him. Even when you saw their changed lives, you didn’t care enough to change and believe him.

‘REFLECTION’

This is a story of Jesus being questioned by the religious leaders about His authority. He responds with a question about John the Baptist’s authority, which puts the leaders in a difficult position. He then tells a parable about two sons, one who initially refuses to work in the vineyard but later repents and goes, and another who agrees to work but doesn’t follow through. Jesus uses this to illustrate who

genuinely follows God's will. So often our children will say 'no' they won't do as you've asked them to, only to find out later, a change of heart turned their 'no' to be a 'yes' after all. Dare I say how often have we been guilty of the same thing?

Today we can understand this passage in a few ways, the first being our **authenticity and integrity**. Jesus' story of the two sons gives a clear example of how important it is that our words are backed up by our actions. If they're not, then how can we expect to be taken seriously? In a world where people often make promises they don't keep- whether in politics, friendships, or the organisation you're connected to, Jesus challenges each of us to reflect on our commitments, authenticity and integrity. Are our promises sincere or shallow?

I would follow that with our commitment to be prepared to **change** and be transformed like the first son. I think I can confidently say that many of us have at some time had to grapple with choices and behaviours that may at first lead us away from the positive path. Jesus encourages us to recognise that it's never too late to change our mind, alter the path we've chosen so we can embrace a more transformative journey. What pathway do you find yourself traveling on today?

Authority and accountability are a big part of Jesus' conversation with the chief priests and elders of those who had gathered around him. Just as they were confronted in their positions and the decisions they made regarding authority, we also must reflect seriously on our own connection to the source of our authority, Christ, to whom we are also accountable. We are often questioned on our belief and values and how they influence our thoughts, actions and interactions with others. Often questioned and just about always being observed.

How we are when we're with others who are either powerful in our part of the world or sit in the margins and anything in between speaks to **our relationship with Christ**. In addressing who truly understands and fulfills God's will, Jesus prompts us to consider social justice and how we can become advocates for the voiceless. Who are the voiceless in our community that you will sit amongst, pray for or become an advocate? The aged, the mentally ill, the disabled, the homeless, the prisoner and their families, the poor, the ADF member and their families, or the asylum seeker. There are many more to choose from.

One of the things we will be judged and observed on is our **faith and actions**. As we continue to have spiritual discussions amongst each other or with strangers who want to know more about our faith, our scripture today is a reminder that our faith is lived out by our actions which are open for all to witness. Jesus is emphasising to us the notion that belief should manifest itself in tangible ways as willing acts of serving others and living according to the ethical principals of a disciplined follower of Christ.

Ultimately Matthew encourages us to delve deeper into our values and actions, prompting each of us to align our lives more closely with our convictions as we embrace the spirit of transformation and a desire for genuine servanthood. When we are serving one another, we also serving Christ our Living Lord.

Amen

PRAYER of INTERCESSION

Jesus, I pray for those who are called to serve in the world in any capacity, that they be your ambassadors for peace and good will. I pray for those who are called to serve in their local community, for doctors, nurses, teachers, members of the police force, prison officers and inmates, probation officers, social workers, aged care workers, shopkeepers, secretaries and those who keep our streets clean and many others, may they know that in serving others they are serving you also.

Lord, I pray for all who are called to serve you in and through your church.

For all lay people, ordained people, church council members, church committees, those who prepare and serve morning tea, the gardeners and maintenance workers, may they know that in serving others they are serving you also.

Creator God, I pray for myself as I remember that I am here because you called me by name into your service not just here, but wherever I am, not just today but every day wherever I am in the future. You call me to serve you with time, gifts, skills in my actions in communities near and far – even when I'm on holidays.

Give me the strength not to stray onto the negative path.

I ask that through the power and willingness of the Holy Spirit I may be enabled to serve you in the way that you choose. This my our prayer. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nwCCT9H2Cg>

