

“IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?”

READING: *Matthew 21 verses 23 - 32*

BACKGROUND

In Matthew 21, we are very near the time of the cross. The chapter begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, as the multitudes cried out "Hosanna!" They were crying out "'Oh saved us' to the Son of David!" Jesus then went into the Temple and drove out all the money changers and merchants, telling them, "It is written, 'My House shall be called a House of Prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" As the chapter progresses, He heals the blind and lame people who came to Him in the Temple, but when the chief priests and scribes saw the miraculous things Jesus did, they were greatly offended. In our reading from Matthew's gospel we read that a day or two later, the chief priests and elders confronted the Lord again in the Temple.

INTRODUCTION

Our days are filled with making responses to one thing or another. For most of us, it starts with the alarm clock every morning. Then we respond to text messages, phone calls, email and all kinds of communications. We respond to heat, cold, hunger and pain; to humour, anger, love, respect and fear; to victories, setbacks and defeats. But how we respond makes a big difference. Someone once said, "I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% of how I react to it." How we respond makes a big difference, and that is especially true when it comes to Jesus. Nothing is more important than our response to Him. How will we respond to Jesus? God's word shows us what to do.

1. First, accept Jesus' authority: Don't be like the Jewish leaders we see in **verse 23**. In effect they were saying, "Who gives you the power and the right to do all the things you are doing?" Jesus, doing the Jewish thing, answered their question with another question. In the short time Jesus had left, He had much more to do, and much more to teach His followers. But these hard-hearted, unbelieving leaders defiantly questioned His authority. That was an amazing thing for them to do, considering the last three years.

Time after time throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus had spoken with great authority. For example, in **Matthew 7 verses 28 and 29**, Matthew finished his record of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" by writing: ***"And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."***

But He also acted with great authority. Wikipedia lists 44 separate miracles that Jesus performed in the New Testament, not counting His own resurrection. The Apostle John closed his Gospel by saying: ***"There are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen."*** (John 21 verse 25). But speaking of hard-hearted people like the chief priests and elders, **John 12 verse 37** says that ***"although (Jesus) had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him."***

Don't be like those stubborn people who rejected Jesus, accept the Lord's authority. **Matthew chapter 8 verses 5-13** tells the story of a Roman soldier who did accept the Lord's authority. The Living Bible records it this way: ***"When Jesus arrived in Capernaum, a Roman army captain came and pled with him to come to his home and heal his servant boy who was in bed paralyzed and racked with pain. "Yes," Jesus said, "I will come and heal him." Then the officer said, "Sir, I am not worthy to have you in my home; [and it isn't necessary for you to come]. If you will only stand here and say, 'Be healed,' my servant will get well! I know,***

because I am under the authority of my superior officers and I have authority over my soldiers, and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave boy, 'Do this or that,' and he does it. And I know you have authority to tell his sickness to go -- and it will go!" Jesus stood there amazed! Turning to the crowd he said, "I haven't seen faith like this in all the land of Israel! And I tell you this, that many Gentiles (like this Roman officer), shall come from all over the world and sit down in the Kingdom of Heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And many an Israelite --those for whom the Kingdom was prepared -- shall be cast into outer darkness, into the place of weeping and torment." Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, "Go on home. What you have believed has happened!" And the boy was healed that same hour!

That soldier responded with great faith. How will you respond to Jesus? Accept Jesus' authority.

2. But also, answer Jesus' questions.

Since it was not yet time for Jesus to die on the cross, He answered their question with another question. Read again **verses 23-27**. These religious leaders remind us of far too many of our own leaders. They didn't care about what was right. They only cared about what was going to further their own selfish agenda. They went where they thought no one could hear them, and plotted for a few minutes. Then they came back out and refused to answer. Saying, "We don't know." was certainly a lie from their point of view, because they rejected John the Baptist as much as they rejected Jesus. Jesus knew what was in their hearts, and we don't want to be like those men. Jesus has some questions for us too. He loves to ask questions. Some think that His favourite question was "Why?" In **Matthew 6 verse 28** Jesus asked His disciples, "Why are you anxious about clothing?" In **Matthew 7 verse 3** He asked, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" In **Matthew 8 verse 26**, Christ's question was, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then in **Matthew 9 verse 4**, Jesus met some of his enemies, and "knowing their thoughts, asked, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'"

Jesus was not asking out of confusion or even curiosity. He knew their thoughts. He knew what was going on under the surface. He wasn't asking because He needed to know." Jesus asks questions to help us think about who we are, what we believe, and what we should be doing with our lives. Of all the Lord's questions, I think the most important must be the question He asked Peter three times in **John 21**: "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" I have been around some of you long enough to know that you do love the Lord. But before you answer that question from Jesus, let me tell you that there is only one standard for our love. He gave us the standard at least four times in the hours before He died on the cross. For example, in **John 14 verse 15**, Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Then in **John 14 verse 21**, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." That's the measuring stick of our love for the Lord, and he has some questions for us today: "Do you trust Me?" - "Will you follow Me?" - "Do you love Me?"

How will you respond to Jesus? Give the right answers to the Lord's questions.

3. But also apply the Lord's lessons.

Jesus knew the hearts of those Christ-rejecting leaders and He had vital lessons to teach that day. So, Jesus began to teach through a parable (**verses 28 – 32**). It was really surprising that the first son ended up doing his father's will. After all, he was determined to be rebellious at first. You can imagine him saying, "No, I'm not going to work in the vineyard! My friends are coming over. We're going to town. We're going out. Working in the vineyard is a drag. Why are you always picking on me?" But a funny thing happened. He changed his mind. He felt bad about his disobedience and decided to obey his father. He actually went and did the work. The second son must have made his father feel proud at first. He sounded obedient, but he wasn't obedient. He started right, but he finished wrong, and the Lord has 3 lessons for us today in this parable.

The first lesson is about honest obedience: Actions speak louder than words. Unfortunately, sometimes we Christians are at least a little bit like that second son. This is an important parable for us because we are those who have said, 'Yes, Lord, I will go.' There may have been a time when we were baptized or confirmed and we promised that Jesus would be the Lord of our lives. 'Yes, Lord, I will go.' There was a time when we said we would be faithful to God's church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service." We have said, "Yes, Father, I will go." But have we kept our commitments? Actions speak louder than words. It's not enough to have good intentions. It's not enough to sound good and look good. We have to be good. **James 1 verse 22** says: **"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."** God wants to see love in action from us. What we DO speaks a lot louder than what we SAY. That's the Lord's lesson of honest obedience.

But Jesus also gives us a lesson about Heaven (verses 31 – 32): The only way for us to enter the kingdom of God is to change our minds about our sin and our selfish ways. We have to turn away from rebellious disobedience, and turn to God, trusting in Him, trusting in His Word - believing what God says about sin and salvation; believing what God's Word says about His love for us; believing what God says about the cross of Jesus Christ. You have to believe enough to open your heart and receive Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. This is the Lord's lesson about Heaven.

Jesus also gives us a lesson about hope. There is hope for the hardest cases! Hear the Lord again in **verses 31 and 32**. There was hope for the thieving tax collectors. There was hope for the prostitutes and through Jesus Christ, there is hope for the hardest cases today!

Someone told the story of a set of parents who sent their little girl to church every Sunday, but they never attended. Everybody knew about the wild parties this couple threw at their home on Saturday nights. A lot of bad behaviour took place there. Then, each Sunday morning, the little girl sat in church alone. But one Sunday, the pastor looked at the congregation and saw the parents sitting with their little girl! They later explained that a Saturday night party got way out of hand, and the noise woke their daughter. She came downstairs, and when she saw the eating and drinking, she asked, "Oh, may I say the prayer? God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food. Amen. Goodnight, everybody." The little girl went back upstairs, but within minutes, uncomfortable guests began to say, "It's getting late. We really ought to be going." Then the parents looked at each other and one asked, "Where do we think WE are going?"

God used their little girl to help turn their lives around. God used their little girl to help them turn to Jesus. There is hope for the hopeless. There is hope for us all in Jesus Christ. So how will you respond to Him? The clock is ticking for now, but one day the ticking will stop and God will call time.. and our response?

PHILIPPIANS 2 verses 1 – 13

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – only continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

MATTHEW 21 verses 23 – 32

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you this authority?’

²⁴ Jesus replied, ‘I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John’s baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?’

They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, “From heaven”, he will ask, “Then why didn’t you believe him?” ²⁶ But if we say, “Of human origin” – we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.’

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’

Then he said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸ ‘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.”

²⁹ “I will not,” he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ ‘Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, “I will, sir,” but he did not go.

³¹ ‘Which of the two did what his father wanted?’

‘The first,’ they answered.

Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² 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.