

“Spiritual Follow-Through”—Matthew 21:28-32

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Spiritual Follow-Through”, is Matthew 21:28-32 → Jesus said: *“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Follow-through is an important aspect to life in so many ways. I’ve been told that hitting a golf ball, baseball or tennis ball properly involves a good follow-through. Follow-through for keeping appointments and commitments when working with others is crucial to maintaining your personal integrity. Follow-through is also very important when striving to accomplish goals in life. How does the old adage go? “The road to

success is not paved with good intentions.”

What about spiritual follow-through? Some people may think of spiritual follow-through as parents “making good” on the promises they made when they had their children baptized. At that time they said they intended gladly and willingly to: ① Remember their children in prayer; ② Keep them in mind of their baptismal covenant; ③ Teach them the Christian faith according to God’s Holy Word; ④ Bring them to worship with the assembly of believers, and; ⑤ Be an example as one of Christ’s disciples so that they may be brought up to live a godly life of repentance and forgiveness to the praise of God’s glory.

Maybe spiritual follow-through brings to your mind the promises which you made in your Confirmation vows where you said you intend: ① To faithfully conform all your life to God’s Word; ② Be faithful in the use of God’s Word and sacraments here at worship with the assembly of believers; and ③ In faith, words, and actions remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death.

Spiritual follow-through is basically living the sanctified life of obedience to the Lord Jesus. Our text records a parable Jesus told allowing the Jewish leaders to search their hearts about the importance of spiritual follow-through in their lives. He told them a story about a father telling his two sons to *go and work in the vineyard*. One refused, later changed his mind and went to work in the vineyard. The other

agreed to work but never showed up for work (verses 28-30).

So, why this parable? Jesus was talking to the workers in God's *vineyard* in His day (i.e. the religious leaders amongst God's people). They demanded to know by what authority Jesus was acting and teaching (cf. Matthew 21:23-27). In the discussion He took them through a "discovery process" about their relationship with the LORD, to Whom they confessed obedience, and their relationship with Himself, Whom they rejected as Yahweh's promised Messiah. This "discovery process" began a question—*What do you think?*—(verse 28) and concluded with the question—*Which of the two did the will of his father?* (verse 31).

Before we point the finger at these religious leaders with a "Shame on you!", have there been times in your life when you've been made aware of not holding to God's revealed will in His written Word and immediately repented and changed your way of thinking? Unfortunately it happens far too often in God's "vineyard" today by His people that they rebel and/or get defensive when made aware of their misunderstanding of God's written Word. They end up being like the second son. They offer lip-service of obedience and dedication while not following through with true actions of submission to our heavenly Father's will. It's no different than the religious leaders of Jesus' day rejecting God's Will for their lives by rejecting Him, instead of placing their faith in Him as God's promised Savior on the basis of His written Word in the Old Testament.

So, in the end, *which of the two* sons in the parable *did do the will of his father?* The chief priests and the elders thought it was rather obvious and so they answered, *The first . . .* and, in the process, condemned themselves. Based upon their initial discussion concerning John the Baptizer's authority, Jesus told them in verse 31 of our text: *Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.* If you don't think that didn't raise some eyebrows! Those "bad sinners" were getting into God's kingdom before these righteous religious leaders? How dare Jesus raise up these people before such righteous people as an example!

If you are going to enter God's kingdom it has to be based upon being righteous. However, it must be a righteousness accomplished **for you** since your righteousness is not righteous enough. It comes only by humble repentance and submission to God's Will for you in Jesus. He told them in verse 32 of our text: *John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.* These "bad sinners" were a perfect example of repentance and the righteousness of faith.

Jesus spoke about the importance of John's ministry (cf. Luke 7:18-28). Luke 7:29-30 says: *When all the people heard what He said about John, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized*

with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. The religious leaders started with faith based upon God's written Word but refused to follow-through spiritually based upon their own traditions, self-righteousness and systems of religion. However, those considered "bad sinners" followed through spiritually by repenting of their sins and believing in the Person & Work of Jesus based upon God's written Word proclaimed by John the Baptizer!

Jesus is not stating that those involved in what people consider to be really "bad sins" are going to heaven while those who "act good" are not. Rather, **He's speaking about how you follow through spiritually when presented with God's Law and Gospel in your life.** His purpose for comparing them to these *tax collectors and . . . prostitutes* was to convict them of sin so they'd respond in the same manner as these "bad sinners" by repenting and believing in Jesus! This is proper spiritual follow-through.

Jesus' parable also hits our hearts as He says to us: *What do you think?* It challenges us about our follow-through actions **for the LORD** as we claim and confess Jesus as Savior and Lord of our lives. Entrance into heaven is the same for all sinners **in Christ**. A Christian admits that we're all the same in our sins and that we all need Jesus. 1 John 1:8-10

says: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Spiritual follow-through is very important as people who confess that Jesus is our Savior and Lord because it involves confronting our rebellious, self-righteous selves and taking our sins to Jesus, our righteous Lord! That's why the first son in the parable is the best example. He repented and went to work. When this happens we too will follow through spiritually and go to work in God's vineyard—not just in the system of “the church” but **as His Church** in the broader vineyard of our workplaces, homes, schools, mission fields in our country and abroad. Spiritual follow-through carries us through repentance and faith into action, having experienced God's forgiving grace and empowering Spirit. Thus, we want God's Will **from His written Word** to be evident in our dealings with ourselves and those around us in the daily vocations of life! Amen.

Therefore, my beloved . . .

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

for it is God Who works in you,

both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

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