

Vol. 24 – Saying and Doing

“A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not. Whether of them two did the will of his father? They say to him, The first.”

In the sermon on the mount Christ said, “Not every one that says to Me, LORD, LORD, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 7:21. The test of sincerity is not in words, but in deeds. Christ does not say to any man, What say you more than others? but, “What do you more than others?” Matthew 5:47. Full of meaning are His words, “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” John 13:17. Words are of no value unless they are accompanied with appropriate deeds. This is the lesson taught in the parable of the two sons.

This parable was spoken at Christ's last visit to Jerusalem before His death. He had driven out the buyers and sellers from the temple. His voice had spoken to their hearts with the power of God. Amazed and terrified, they had obeyed His command without excuse or resistance.

When their terror was abated, the priests and elders, returning to the temple, had found Christ healing the sick and the dying. They had heard the voice of rejoicing and the song of praise. In the temple itself the children who had been restored to health were waving palm branches and singing hosannas to the Son of David. Baby voices were lisping the praises of the mighty Healer. Yet with the priests and elders all this did not suffice to overcome their prejudice and jealousy.

The next day, as Christ was teaching in the temple, the chief priests and elders of the people came to Him and said, “By what authority do You these things? and who gave You this authority?”

The priests and elders had had unmistakable evidence of Christ's power. In His cleansing of the temple they had seen Heaven's authority flashing from His face. They could not resist the power by which He spoke. Again in His wonderful deeds of healing He had answered their question. He had given evidence of His authority which could not be controverted. But it was not evidence that was wanted. The priests and elders were anxious for Jesus to proclaim Himself the Messiah that they might misapply His words and stir up

the people against Him. They wished to destroy His influence and to put Him to death.

Jesus knew that if they could not recognize God in Him or see in His works the evidence of His divine character, they would not believe His own testimony that He was the Christ. In His answer He evades the issue they hope to bring about and turns the condemnation upon themselves. “I also will ask you one thing,” He said, “which if you tell Me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, where was it? from heaven, or of men?”

The priests and rulers were perplexed. “They reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven, He will say to us, Why did you not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men, we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We can not tell. And He said to them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

“We can not tell.” This answer was a falsehood. But the priests saw the position they were in, and falsified in order to screen themselves. John the Baptist had come bearing witness of the One whose authority they were now questioning. He had pointed Him out, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. He had baptized Him, and after the baptism, as Christ was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God like a dove rested upon Him, while a voice from heaven was heard saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:17.

Remembering how John had repeated the prophecies concerning the Messiah, remembering the scene at the baptism of Jesus, the priests and rulers dared not say that John's baptism was from heaven. If they acknowledged John to be a prophet, as they believed him to be, how could they deny his testimony that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God? And they could not say that John's baptism was of men, because of the people, who believed John to be a prophet. So they said, “We can not tell.”

Then Christ gave the parable of the father and the two sons. When the father went to the first son, saying, “Go work today in my vineyard,” the son promptly answered, “I will not.” He refused to obey, and gave himself up to wicked ways and associations. But afterward he repented, and obeyed the call.

The father went to the second son with the same command, "Go work today in my vineyard." This son made reply, "I go, sir," but he went not.

In this parable the father represents God, the vineyard the church. By the two sons are represented two classes of people. The son who refused to obey the command, saying, "I will not," represented those who were living in open transgression, who made no profession of piety, who openly refused to come under the yoke of restraint and obedience which the law of God imposes. But many of these afterward repented and obeyed the call of God. When the gospel came to them in the message of John the Baptist, "Repent you; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," they repented, and confessed their sins. (Matthew 3:2.)

In the son who said, "I go, sir," and went not, the character of the Pharisees was revealed. Like this son, the Jewish leaders were impenitent and self-sufficient. The religious life of the Jewish nation had become a pretense. When the law was proclaimed on Mount Sinai by the voice of God, all the people pledged themselves to obey. They said, "I go, sir," but they went not. When Christ came in person to set before them the principles of the law, they rejected Him. Christ had given the Jewish leaders of His day abundant evidence of His authority and divine power, but although they were convinced, they would not accept the evidence. Christ had shown them that they continued to disbelieve because they had not the spirit which leads to obedience. He had declared to them, "You made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. . . . In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15:6, 9.

In the company before Christ there were scribes and Pharisees, priests and rulers, and after giving the parable of the two sons, Christ addressed to His hearers the question, "Whether of them two did the will of his father?" Forgetting themselves, the Pharisees answered, "The first." This they said without realizing that they were pronouncing sentence against themselves. Then there fell from Christ's lips the denunciation, "Verily I say to you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and you, when you had seen it, repented not afterward, that you might believe him."

John the Baptist came preaching truth, and by his preaching sinners were convicted and converted. These would go into the kingdom of heaven before the ones who in self-righteousness resisted the solemn warning. The publicans and harlots were ignorant, but these learned men knew the way of

truth. Yet they refused to walk in the path which leads to the Paradise of God. The truth that should have been to them a savour of life to life became a savour of death to death. Open sinners who loathed themselves had received baptism at the hands of John; but these teachers were hypocrites. Their own stubborn hearts were the obstacle to their receiving the truth. They resisted the conviction of the Spirit of God. They refused obedience to God's commandments.

Christ did not say to them, You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven; but He showed that the obstacle which prevented them from entering was of their own creating. The door was still open to these Jewish leaders; the invitation was still held out. Christ longed to see them convicted and converted.

The priests and elders of Israel spent their lives in religious ceremonies, which they regarded as too sacred to be connected with secular business. Therefore their lives were supposed to be wholly religious. But they performed their ceremonies to be seen by men that they might be thought by the world to be pious and devoted. While professing to obey they refused to render obedience to God. They were not doers of the truth which they professed to teach.

Christ declared John the Baptist to be one of the greatest of the prophets, and He showed His hearers that they had had sufficient evidence that John was a messenger from God. The words of the preacher in the wilderness were with power. He bore his message unflinchingly, rebuking the sins of priests and rulers, and enjoining upon them the works of the kingdom of heaven. He pointed out to them their sinful disregard of their Father's authority in refusing to do the work appointed them. He made no compromise with sin, and many were turned from their unrighteousness.

Had the profession of the Jewish leaders been genuine, they would have received John's testimony and accepted Jesus as the Messiah. But they did not show the fruits of repentance and righteousness. The very ones whom they despised were pressing into the kingdom of God before them.

In the parable the son who said, "I go, sir," represented himself as faithful and obedient; but time proved that his profession was not real. He had no true love for his father. So the Pharisees prided themselves on their holiness, but when tested, it was found wanting. When it was for their interest to do so, they made the requirements of the law very exacting; but when obedience was required from themselves, by cunning sophistries they reasoned away the force of God's precepts. Of them Christ declared, "Do not you after their

works; for they say, and do not.” Matthew 23:3. They had no true love for God or man. God called them to be co-workers with Him in blessing the world; but while in profession they accepted the call, in action they refused obedience. They trusted to self, and prided themselves on their goodness; but they set the commands of God at defiance. They refused to do the work which God had appointed them, and because of their transgression the LORD was about to divorce Himself from the disobedient nation.

Self-righteousness is not true righteousness, and those who cling to it will be left to take the consequences of holding a fatal deception. Many today claim to obey the commandments of God, but they have not the love of God in their hearts to flow forth to others. Christ calls them to unite with Him in His work for the saving of the world, but they content themselves with saying, “I go, sir.” They do not go. They do not co-operate with those who are doing God's service. They are idlers. Like the unfaithful son, they make false promises to God. In taking upon themselves the solemn covenant of the church they have pledged themselves to receive and obey the word of God, to give themselves to God's service, but they do not do this. In profession they claim to be sons of God, but in life and character they deny the relationship. They do not surrender the will to God. They are living a lie.

The promise of obedience they appear to fulfill when this involves no sacrifice; but when self-denial and self-sacrifice are required, when they see the cross to be lifted, they draw back. Thus the conviction of duty wears away, and known transgression of God's commandments becomes habit. The ear may hear God's word, but the spiritual perceptive powers have departed. The heart is hardened, the conscience seared.

Do not think that because you do not manifest decided hostility to Christ you are doing Him service. We thus deceive our own souls. By withholding that which God has given us to use in His service, be it time or means or any other of His entrusted gifts, we work against Him.

Satan uses the listless, sleepy indolence of professed Christians to strengthen his forces and win souls to his side. Many, who think that though they are doing no actual work for Christ, they are yet on His side, are enabling the enemy to pre-occupy ground and gain advantages. By their failure to be diligent workers for the Master, by leaving duties undone and words unspoken, they have allowed Satan to gain control of souls who might have been won for Christ.

We can never be saved in indolence and inactivity. There is no such thing as a truly converted person living a helpless, useless life. It is not possible for us to drift into heaven. No sluggard can enter there. If we do not strive to gain an entrance into the kingdom, if we do not seek earnestly to learn what constitutes its laws, we are not fitted for a part in it. Those who refuse to co-operate with God on earth would not co-operate with Him in heaven. It would not be safe to take them to heaven.

There is more hope for publicans and sinners than for those who know the word of God but refuse to obey it. He who sees himself a sinner with no cloak for his sin, who knows that he is corrupting soul, body, and spirit before God, becomes alarmed lest he be eternally separated from the kingdom of heaven. He realizes his diseased condition, and seeks healing from the great Physician who has said, "Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. These souls the LORD can use as workers in His vineyard.

The son who for a time refused obedience to his father's command was not condemned by Christ; and neither was he commended. The class who act the part of the first son in refusing obedience deserve no credit for holding this position. Their frankness is not to be regarded as a virtue. Sanctified by truth and holiness, it would make men bold witnesses for Christ; but used as it is by the sinner, it is insulting and defiant, and approaches to blasphemy. The fact that a man is not a hypocrite does not make him any the less really a sinner. When the appeals of the Holy Spirit come to the heart, our only safety lies in responding to them without delay. When the call comes, "Go work today in My vineyard," do not refuse the invitation. "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Hebrews 4:7. It is unsafe to delay obedience. You may never hear the invitation again.

And let none flatter themselves that sins cherished for a time can easily be given up by and by. This is not so. Every sin cherished weakens the character and strengthens habit; and physical, mental, and moral depravity is the result. You may repent of the wrong you have done, and set your feet in right paths; but the mold of your mind and your familiarity with evil will make it difficult for you to distinguish between right and wrong. Through the wrong habits formed, Satan will assail you again and again.

In the command, "Go work today in My vineyard," the test of sincerity is brought to every soul. Will there be deeds as well as words? Will the one called put to use all the knowledge he has, working faithfully, disinterestedly, for the Owner of the vineyard?

The apostle Peter instructs us as to the plan on which we must work. “Grace and peace be multiplied to you,” he says, “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our LORD, according as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.” 2 Peter 1:2-7.

If you cultivate faithfully the vineyard of your soul, God is making you a labourer together with Himself. And you will have a work to do not only for yourself, but for others. In representing the church as the vineyard, Christ does not teach that we are to restrict our sympathies and labours to our own numbers. The LORD's vineyard is to be enlarged. In all parts of the earth He desires it to be extended. As we receive the instruction and grace of God, we should impart to others a knowledge of how to care for the precious plants. Thus we may extend the vineyard of the LORD. God is watching for evidence of our faith, love, and patience. He looks to see if we are using every spiritual advantage to become skilful workers in His vineyard on earth, that we may enter the Paradise of God, that Eden home from which Adam and Eve were excluded by transgression.

God stands toward His people in the relation of a father, and He has a father's claim to our faithful service. Consider the life of Christ. Standing at the head of humanity, serving His Father, He is an example of what every son should and may be. The obedience that Christ rendered God requires from human beings today. He served His Father with love, in willingness and freedom. “I delight to do Your will, O My God,” He declared; “yea, Your law is within My heart.” Psalm 40:8. Christ counted no sacrifice too great, no toil too hard, in order to accomplish the work which He came to do. At the age of twelve He said, “Wist you not that I must be about My Father's business?” Luke 2:49. He had heard the call, and had taken up the work. “My meat,” He said, “is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.” John 4:34.

Thus we are to serve God. He only serves who acts up to the highest standard of obedience. All who would be sons and daughters of God must prove themselves co-workers with God and Christ and the heavenly angels. This is the test for every soul. Of those who faithfully serve Him the LORD says,

“They shall be Mine, . . . in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him.” Malachi 3:17.

God's great object in the working out of His providences is to try men, to give them opportunity to develop character. Thus He proves whether they are obedient or disobedient to His commands. Good works do not purchase the love of God, but they reveal that we possess that love. If we surrender the will to God, we shall not work in order to earn God's love. His love as a free gift will be received into the soul, and from love to Him we shall delight to obey His commandments.

There are only two classes in the world today, and only two classes will be recognized in the judgment – those who violate God's law and those who obey it. Christ gives the test by which to prove our loyalty or disloyalty. “If you love Me,” He says, “keep My commandments. . . . He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me. And he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. . . . He that loves Me not keeps not My sayings; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me.” “If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.” John 14:15-24; 15:10.

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