

Every Knee Shall Bow
Philippians 2:1-13, Mathew 21:28-32

As kids, how many of us heard our parents say “Clean your room,” and we said, “Sure, I’ll be right there” and we went on to finish whatever we were doing (reading a book, playing with our toys, watching television ... whatever we found more important in the moment) and we never seemed to get to cleaning our room? (or at least not before the threats and punishment came.)

So, maybe you don’t want to admit to doing this ... but how about your children? Does it sound like anything they’ve ever done?

Truth – definitely me and definitely my kids. Even as adults! My biggest “Just one minute!” has always been books ... “Just one more chapter, one more page ...”

Maybe you’ve heard someone volunteer to take care of a project in a group you belong to, or say they’ll make phone calls ... but they never end up doing it.

At work, someone says they’ll take the responsibility of opening up the office every day ... but they’re always late. It’s frustrating when promises are made and someone doesn’t follow through with them.

Here’s where we really start feeling bad about our “yeses” that end up being “no’s.” How about when a friend asks you to pray and you say “yes,” but you get busy, and you just honestly forget or you put something before the promised and important prayer?

Or the other side ... as a child, when asked to clean your room, did you ever say, “But mom, I’m right in the middle of this game, can’t it wait until later?” And then we feel guilty, or afraid of the punishment, or sad that we upset her, and we clean our room.

Or maybe you didn’t want to volunteer to chair the next bake sale, and said so, but no one else said “yes” ... so you took it on yourself.

You hate talking on the phone, so you say “no” when asked to call everyone to say a meeting date has changed. But then you feel bad, and you do it.

You certainly don’t want to be the one to arrive before everyone else to work – especially on a dark, cold winter morning ... but then you realize you might as well be the one to do it.

Or you tell your friends that you just aren’t a very good pray-er, but then realize that if you continue to speak to God, you’ll be come a better pray-er and God will certainly love the relationship – so you pray!

If you have been on either end of these scenarios, you will understand today’s parable of the two sons.

Knowing the context of the parable helps. Before this parable, Jesus saw a fig tree that bore no fruit.

He said to it, “*May no fruit ever come from you again!*” The fig tree withered. When the disciples asked how that had happened, Jesus told them that if they only had faith, faith that these things were possible, then you could tell the mountain to be lifted up and thrown into the sea. If you ask for something in prayer that follows God’s guides, with faith, you will receive it.

Then, Jesus has a run-in with the chief priests and elders in the temple. They question where Jesus’ authority comes from to be teaching in the temple.

Immediately after today’s parable, Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants. I won’t go too deeply because it’s next week’s parable. But, after Jesus tells that parable, He repeats scripture, saying, “*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes.*”

He’s talking about the chief priests and Pharisees that will reject the cornerstone – reject Jesus – as their Savior and Lord; the chief priests and Pharisees that look like “*a fig tree,*” filled with big, beautiful, green leaves ... they look like religious people, they look spiritually alive, but they produce no fruit.

Jesus is talking about those who say all the right words, who promise God to be faithful, promise to carry out the mission of His church, promise to love God’s children, feed the hungry, care for the sick; who tell God: “You can count on me!” ... “I’ll go out into the vineyard and pick up the rocks, prune the vines, pick the grapes.” And then they don’t.

They say the right words in front of everyone, they lead worship, they invite friends to their home for a Bible study, but behind closed doors it's a whole different story. They don't do any feeding, any clothing, any loving – except of their friends.

You can't judge a book by its cover – this cover is beautiful and promises a great story, but inside there's no depth to be found, no love, no compassion, no trust, no faith. The book, the fig tree, the person – none of them produce what's been promised.

The other son? When asked, he said, "No." He's the tax collectors, the prostitutes, those who didn't cover up their sins. When they're asked to feed the poor, care for the sick, visit those in jail? They say, "Are you crazy? Do you see the lives we lead? Do you know who we are? That's not the kind of people we are." But then, those are the people who said, "Wow! I know that man down on his luck! My neighbor just lost her husband! That man is new in town and now he's in the hospital. There's no one to visit him." So, these are the people who said "No," but did the work anyway.

Jesus asks the chief priests and elders which son does the will of his father, the one who says, "Yes I will," but doesn't or the one who says, "No" but does – and they answer that the son who says "No," but does what the father asks has done the will of his father.

And then Jesus tells them, *"Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of 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 after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."* You acted like men of faith, but clearly you are not!"

The people who actually listened to Jesus, followed Jesus, had faith in Jesus, were usually those who didn't appear all "churchy," doing things just so and appearing to the world as better people than they actually were. These are the ones who went and did what Jesus asked.

So, Jesus is asking us to go out and work in the vineyard – in the messed-up world we're living in. It's an invitation to practice what we preach and it's not always easy! It can be really messy and scary and many of us would say "No" because we don't think we have it in us to care for a friend with dementia, a family member with schizophrenia, a friend who has nowhere to sleep, a child who has no parents and also has anger issues.

We think we have to fix the lives of women who have been abused, of soldiers who have lost limbs ... but sometimes God is just asking us to be present, to let them know they aren't alone, to show compassion, to give them a meal and a coat – maybe you're the one to bring them to an agency who has the ability to do more.

Jesus had a problem with the Pharisees who didn't think they needed a change of heart, as opposed to the tax collectors and prostitutes who actually had a change of heart and did the work.

I want to re-read the passage from Philippians because this is how Jesus wants us to live. It may take a change of heart, drawing on compassion, seeing the world as God sees it ... and we may be the ones who say "No" to Jesus when first asked, but we need to become the ones who say "yes" ... because eventually EVERY knee will bow to God! Listen to this passage as if Paul is speaking to the chief priests, the elders, the Pharisees – as if Paul, who was once a zealous (an extremely passionate) Jew, persecuting the Christians – is trying to shake them up, make them believe (not just talking to the Philippians and not just to us!)

In Philippians 2:1-13, Paul writes:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Listen guys – Jesus is the real deal. I'm trying to help you here – believe as I do!)

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

(The chief priests and Pharisees would have to completely turn their lives around to be this kind of people, as should we when we accept Christ and die to sin.)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.

*Therefore, God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus **EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW**,*

(whether you believe Jesus is God's Son, is God come to earth in human form; whether you believe that Jesus died for your sins or not — you are still going to be bowing to Him eventually!!)

*...every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and **under the earth**, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

(and now this is for the Philippians:)

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

I think back to our Covid days, trying to find any kind of good that came from it. You know what I find I actually miss from that time? One of the blessings that came from that scary time is that we were made to slow down and truly evaluate our lives.

We stopped and saw what was most important and what just didn't matter, what wasn't going so well, what mistakes we had made and what changes we needed to make. We were able to stop and focus on God and the true joy in our lives. We stopped bowing to the worldly things that had taken over our lives, our time, and turned and bowed to God.

A lot of bad stuff happened, though. We couldn't hug our friends. We missed sharing meals together. Through forced isolation, drug dependencies rose, those with mental illness often found it difficult to get help, families were unable to be with their loved ones causing some of our elderly relatives to feel rejected and alone.

Many of us know people who were very sick and some of us have friends or family that died. We found ourselves bowing to fear and anxiety.

But even those things made us realize the paths we need to follow to make a difference in God's world.

Jesus tells us to be the son who actually went out into the vineyard and did the work.

Have compassion and sympathy; be of one mind — Christ's mind. Do not be selfish nor conceited, instead live in humility, be humble, looking to others as better than yourselves, putting the interests of others before your own.

The day is coming when every knee shall bow at the Name of Jesus, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Romans 10:9-10 says, "*if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.*"

One day everyone will believe it, but, sadly, it will be too late for many. Once again, I tell you of God's promise ... If you haven't yet invited Jesus into your life and turned to become the one who goes into the messy world when Jesus calls you, you can do so now by committing yourself to Jesus in prayer. God will hear you and He will accept you as His own precious child.

If you've accepted Jesus in the past, but you realized that you've been distant and wanting to say "No" to God more often than not, if you have put more importance in the world than you have in Jesus, than God welcomes you to come back to Him. He waits with open arms.

This is God's promise — all who say "Yes" and then follow Jesus in faith; or even those who say "No," but then change their hearts and turn to follow Him ... all of us who answer God's call will one day find our home with God in Heaven for all of eternity.

Let's not be afraid to go out and invite everyone to join us!