

Great Reasons to Do the Father's Will:

June 8, 2008

1. We have heard the saving truth (28, 32)
2. We have seen the saving effect (29, 31, 32)

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, **“I tell you the truth, 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.**

Great Reasons to Do the Father's Will:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and
godliness through our knowledge of him who called
us by his own glory and goodness.*

2 Peter 1:3

“John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”

(Matthew 21:25). Jesus asked this question of the Jewish leaders. *“Wait a minute!”* they must’ve been thinking. *“We were the ones who asked him where he got his authority! He can’t just turn the question around on us!”* But Jesus had trapped the Jewish leaders. If they answered honestly—that they thought John’s baptism was only of human authority, they knew the crowd would have it out for them. Even the people in the crowd knew John’s baptism was from heaven—he was a prophet of God. Those people wouldn’t have allowed the Jewish leaders to rob them of the comfort John’s baptism gave them. With authority from heaven, John preached repentance—and many repented. With authority from heaven, John preached forgiveness—and many were comforted. But the chief priests and elders of the people refused to be baptized by John. They saw no need! Of what sin did they need to be cleansed? *“Repentance is for the masses—the tax collectors and prostitutes. Let them change their ways and do what is right! We are God’s chief priests. We are God’s chosen elders. We are the ones who do God’s will.”* But Jesus was not about to let them get away with thinking they were doing God’s will. Today our Savior’s words give us great reasons to do the Father’s will: we have heard the saving truth...and we have seen the saving effects.

The father’s voice was gentle, yet filled with a sense of urgency. *“Child, today I want you to go and work in the vineyard.”* His first son fired back, *“No, I won’t.”* So he went to his other son with the same endearing but urgent request. What thoughts were then going through this son’s mind? *“Here’s my chance to make myself look pretty good compared to my brother.”* You see, he didn’t know that his brother had changed his mind. After he initially refused to go work, the father’s words made the first son reconsider. With repentant feet, he walked to his father’s vineyard. With repentant hands, he worked as his father had wanted. But the other son didn’t know that. So he thought he’d capitalize on his brother’s refusal to make himself look good. So he respectfully and yet a little smugly told his father that *he* would go and work, inferring that he would do what his brother was unwilling to do. But his actions were not consistent with his answer. He never went out there to work! **“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”** Jesus asked those Jewish leaders. **“The first,” they answered.** They were right. Even though the first son was initially disrespectful toward his father, he did change his mind later and did what his father wanted. The other son was respectful but *disobedient*. Jesus made no bones about the fact that the Jewish leaders were like the disobedient son. And who was like the first son—the obedient one? The tax collectors and prostitutes! **“I tell you the truth, 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.”

The Jewish leaders thought they had great respect for God. But they said one thing and did another. Sure, they appeared outwardly to be doing God’s will. They fasted and prayed out loud in the streets and gave great sums of money to the temple. But they did it all to draw attention to themselves. They may have honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from him. Like that second son, they gave the appearance of following God’s will, but they were really following their own wills. The standards that they had set up for themselves and others were rules that they had made up—rules that actually detracted from the gospel.

God’s will was that they repent of their sins—just like John the Baptist preached. Who knows how many tax collectors, prostitutes and coarse sinners walked the roads of repentance to the Jordan River and had their sins washed away! According to Jesus, more of them than did the Jewish leaders.

And this, even when they saw the way John lived. John the Baptist himself followed and even surpassed the Jewish leaders’ own standard for conduct. Not only *John’s* life, but they had to have seen new lives of repentance in former prostitutes and formerly dishonest tax men. You might remember the Pharisee at whose house Jesus was having dinner. There was a woman in town who had lived a sinful life. When she found out Jesus was there dining with Simon the Pharisee, she walked a repentant road to that house and found Jesus. She carried in her penitent hands a jar of expensive perfume. She wet his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. She kissed his feet and poured the perfume on them. Reading the thoughts of Simon, Jesus knew he was disgusted with the whole scene. But, as he told his host, her many sins were forgiven. And it was evident that she knew it by her penitent act of love for Jesus.

The Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day saw the well-worn way of righteousness—the road of repentance that John the Baptist walked and countless others who had left their lives of sin to live new lives under the will of God. They saw that repentance in the lives of others, but refused to walk it themselves. Because they didn’t think they needed repentance, they walked the roads of their own wills.

Today and everyday, we do well to examine the way of righteousness which we walk. How well-worn is that road of repentance? Yes, like the first son, the Father’s words have given us a change of mind and a change of heart. Like the coarse sinners in Jesus’ day, the faithful preaching of the gospel has caused a 180 degree change in our lives. But it’s easy to let the pace slow on the way of righteousness. It’s easy to let our minds and our feet wander from will of God to the will of me.

But how does that happen? How do our own selfish will and desires detract us from *God’s* will and desires for our lives? It happens when we begin to lose sight of our need for repentance, like the Jewish leaders. The less we see our many sins, the more confident we feel in our own will and desires to take care of us. The less we recognize how often we daily fail God, the more we will fail him and not recognize it. It’s then that our lives of faith might begin to resemble the self-righteousness and self-ritual of the Jewish leaders. Overconfidence will manifest itself in a judgmental attitude toward those among us who may not hide their sinful behavior as well as we do. Often we don’t see the saving effects of the gospel in others only because we’re not looking for them. We may start to put a lot of stock in standards that we’ve set up for ourselves. We boast to ourselves how we “show up” and “pay up” like “good children of God should.” But all the while we may leave the will of God undone in our lives at home and at work and at play. All because we let the Pharisee take over, who suppresses God’s will and justifies his own. We can even get quite creative in convincing ourselves that what we want in life is really what God wants for us. “*Well, God wants me to be happy.*”

The story is told of an old Scottish woman who walked all over Scotland to country homes selling thread and buttons and shoestrings. Whenever she came to an unmarked crossroad, she would

toss a stick in the air and go whichever way the stick pointed. One day she was seen tossing the stick into the air several times. When someone asked her why, she said, “*It keeps pointing to the road on the right, and I want to go on the road to the left. It looks smoother.*” She kept throwing the stick in the air until it finally pointed to the road she wanted to walk.

Do we sometimes do the same when it comes to obeying God’s will? Do we sometimes we put a convenient spin on God’s will that really turns it into *our* will? It’s not as if we don’t know what his will is. He summarizes it for us in the Ten Commandments. He summarizes it for us with the law of love: love God and love your neighbor. He summarizes it for us with the Great Commission, to go and make disciples for him. He even exemplified it for us with the life of John the Baptist, and especially with the life of Jesus. But Jesus didn’t just exemplify a life under the will of God. Jesus fulfilled the perfect life under God’s will when we couldn’t.

Our lives were no better than the greedy, dishonest tax collectors. Our lives were no better than the prostitutes’. Our lives were no better than Jewish leaders who made up their own rules to follow and feel good about. But God has given us a new life. We have heard the *Way* of righteousness—his name is Jesus. He took us off the road destined for hell and placed us on the road of repentance. On that road, we see all the ways we have failed the Father. But we also see the Father’s forgiveness, for the sake of his Son.

God has given us reasons to live our new lives! He’s given us new ears to hear the saving truth and believe; new eyes to look at each other for who we really are. Though some among us still struggle visibly with our old lives of sin, when we realistically see our own struggle, we thank God for the evidence of repentance we *do* see in each other’s lives.

God has given us reasons to live our new lives! He’s given us new feet to walk in his will, new hands to do the work he calls us to. We have the power and ability to do his will in the Ten Commandments, the Great Commission, and the law of love. We have great *reasons* to do his will in them.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans says that it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance. That kindness of the father is the kindness that led the first son to change his mind and go to work in his father’s vineyard. It’s the kindness of the Father, seen in the life and death of Jesus, that led a harlot to show the extravagance of her love to Jesus with her tears, her hair, her kisses and perfume. And it’s the kindness of the Father that leads us all to walk on the way of righteousness as we live lives of service and obedience to him. We have great reasons to do the Father’s will. We have heard the saving truth. We have seen the saving effect. Amen.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Colossians 3:15

