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What Do You Think? Which Son Was Faithful?

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hear the Word of God from Matthew 21,

“Jesus said, ‘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.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered. But later he changed his mind and went.

Then the Father went to the other son, and said the same thing. The second son answered, ‘I will, sir.’ But he did not go.

Which of the two did what his father wanted?

‘The first’, they answered.

Then Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth. The tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came 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.’”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

“What do you think?” You ought to be a little nervous when Jesus asks that question, because the Divine Physician has His stethoscope right over your heart, and He’s listening for faith and unbelief. So what do you think?

A man had two sons. The older son was somewhat snotty. The first words out of his mouth to his father were always “NO!” Firstborns can be like that. They’re used to undivided attention, and undiluted praise for every little thing. And they aren’t exactly thrilled when number two or three shows up. First-borns are often demanding, rule-makers, attention grabbers, the parent pleasers and the tradition keepers. It’s no accident that a large number of pastors are first-born sons. I wasn’t. I was second born. But when the first born isn’t getting his way, he usually lets the parents know it.

So we’re not all that surprised to hear a snotty “NO” to the Father’s request to work in the vineyard, followed by a reluctant turn on the heels as the son heads to the vineyard to do the work anyway. Duty and obligation call. We don’t know if the son was happy about it, or if he kicked stones and dirt, and mouthing off to himself, as he went to the vineyard. All we know is that he changed his mind, and did what his father asked him.

The second son does exactly the opposite – which second sons are prone to do. What are you supposed to do when you live in the constant shadow of an older brother who gets all the praise? So the second son does what he’s used to doing: He says a pious and respectful ‘Yes, Sir’, probably snaps a crisp salute, and then heads off to party with his buddies.

So, Jesus then asks us the loaded question: ‘Which of the two did the will of his father? What do you think?’ Remember Jesus’ stethoscope is listening for faith in your heart.

Now, before you answer that loaded question, notice a couple of things: Who’s the first son, according to Jesus? It’s not the religious types. Jesus says that the first son represents the ‘tax collectors and prostitutes’. Let’s put that in terms we can relate to: The first son is too busy worshiping money and pleasures. So they reject their Father’s acceptance and love, because they’re too busy having fun sinning. Their whole lives were one big, fat ‘NO’ to Jesus, until they came to their senses and realized that their Father had given them the sweetest deal of their lives – the free forgiveness of all of their sins, a Father Who never stopped loving them, and a brand new life.

For Performance Plan people, the ‘religious’ and the book-keepers – who keep tabs on everyone else’s performance, there’s nothing more offensive than FREE forgiveness. The idea that tax collectors, prostitutes, and a whole world of prodigals enter the vineyard – which represents the Father’s kingdom – ticks them off to no end. God, You’re not supposed to be that good. And You’re not supposed to forgive that easily.’

I want you to notice something really critical: Despite their sins, both of the sons are still considered ‘sons’ by the Father. Are they ‘deadbeat sons’? Yes. But to the Father, they’re still ‘sons’. Both still have a place in the Father’s family, a place in the Father’s vineyard, and a place at the Father’s table. Both of them still live under their Father’s good graces, even though neither of them are terribly likeable or loyal. The same applies to us. Regardless of our lip service or our lives, through Jesus, we’re still in our Father’s good graces, and we still have a place in our Father’s family and at our Father’s table, even when we’ve behaved like snotty, sinful children. The Father never retracts your place in His family or in His grace; although you can reject it and lose it!

So what do you think? Which of the two sons did their Father’s will? The easy answer is the first son. That’s the answer from the religious authorities. The one who kept the commandments. He may have grumbled and mumbled, like a teenager who’s just been asked to clean up his or her room, but in the end, they do what their Father asks.

But wait a minute! If you stop and think about it, neither of the sons really did the will of his Father. Not with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Neither of them did the will of his Father by word and deed, with lips and life. Thus, both of them need to repent – the first son for his words; and the second son for his deeds, or lack of them.

If the truth be told, you and I are represented by BOTH of the two sons. Sometimes we’re quick to say “YES” to God, like the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, “***Yes, Lord, we will do everything you have asked.***” But then we turn around and go about all of our idolatries Monday-Saturday, as though Jesus were still dead and in His grave. And then, at other times, we just say “NO” to our Father. ‘*Fear, love and trust in God above all things?*’ *NO!* ‘*Honor God’s Name?*’ ‘*Gladly worship and receive God’s gifts?*’ ‘*Honor your father and your mother?*’ ‘*Be content with what you have?*’ *And we say, “no, nO, No, NO, NO!!”*. And though we often times have a guilty conscience and a change of mind, our heart still isn’t in it. **Page 3**

So what do you think? I'll tell you what I think. I think the Father of the parable needs another Son – a Son who truly fears, loves, and trusts in His Father, a Son Who says 'Yes' to His Father's will, and then backs up His words with His life. I think what the Father needs is another Son – a faithful Son, Who takes up the work of his brothers. I think the Father needs another Son – a Son Who empties Himself, rolls up His sleeves and says, "***Father, not my will, but Yours' be done.***" I think the Father needs another Son – a Son Who lives perfectly and dies innocently for all of us bratty first sons and daughters, and all of us disobedient second sons and daughters, and then gives us His forgiveness and perfect righteousness as a gift, so we can live in the Father's good graces, and the Father's family forever. When you look at how poor and miserable the first two sinful sons are, I think the Father needs another Son – a Son Who gets the Father's work done, and then lets his brothers and sisters get all the credit.

Philippians 2, "***Consider Christ Jesus, Who, being in very nature God, did not consider His being equal with God, as something to be grasped and held onto. But He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant....and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.***"

2nd Corinthians 5:21, "***God made Him – His only begotten Son – Who had no sin, to be sin for us; so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.***" And now that Jesus has done all of the work the Father asked us to do, and died to forgive us for all of our sins, all of us bratty and disobedient kids, get a forever place at our Father's table, a place in our Father's heavenly vineyard, and we get to live forever in our Father's good graces, all because the Father had one Faithful Son, and we had another brother, Who always said "YES" to His Father, and our Father, for our salvation! This is how blessed we are to have Jesus as our brother and our Savior!

God, the Father, asked Jesus, 'Son, I need you to be born in blood, so that you can die in blood for your brothers and sisters sins.' And Jesus said, 'YES!' 'Son, I need you to get life right, where your brothers and sisters got life wrong, so that you can give them your womb to tomb righteousness.' And Jesus said, 'YES!' 'Son, I need you to go to the vineyard of Gethsemane to be crushed for your brothers and sisters.' And Jesus said, "Yes!"

'Son, I need you to face the hell of being separated and abandoned by me, your daddy for the first time in eternity.' And Jesus said, *'YES!'* *'Son, I need you to die for your brothers and sisters.'* And Jesus said, *"YES!"* *'Son, I finally need you to rise again, and conquer death for your brothers and sisters.'* And Jesus said, *"YES!"* And God's Word tells us that ***"Jesus always did what was pleasing to His Father."*** And we're told what that means for us in Romans 5, which says, ***"And by the obedience of the One Man (Jesus), the many will be declared righteous."*** Because of Jesus, God now sees all of us as His beautiful sons and daughters, as beautiful as our brother, Jesus.

There's a song by Twila Paris called "HOW BEAUTIFUL", that sums up all that our Big Brother, Jesus, did for us, by always saying "YES" to His Father on our behalf. The song reads like this:

How Beautiful the hands that served, the wine and the bread, and the sons of the earth
How Beautiful the feet that trod, the long dusty road on the way to the cross.
How Beautiful the heart that bled, that took all my sins and bore it instead.
How Beautiful His tender eyes, that chose to forgive and never despise. How beautiful!

And because of our beautiful big brother, Jesus, our Father forgives every disobedient son and daughter, who were too captivated by sin, or too disinterested in our Father's will, to live for our dear daddy. Thankfully, God had another beautiful son, Who has set all things right between us, and our heavenly daddy. Because of our big brother's love, in repentance we now say "NO" to our sinful flesh, and we put it to death; and in faith, born of God's love in Jesus, we join Jesus in saying "YES" to our Father's will, Who always said "YES" to His daddy, to forgive us and give us a place in the family. The song I referenced above concludes with these words:

And as He laid down His life, we offer this sacrifice;
That we will live, just as He died; willingly to pay the price.
How Beautiful when humble hearts give, the fruit of pure lives, so that others may live
How Beautiful the feet that bring, the sound of Good News, and the love of our King.
How Beautiful the hands that serve, the wine and the bread, and the sons of the earth!
How Beautiful we are to the Father in Jesus. AMEN!