

²⁸“What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in my vineyard.’ ²⁹He answered, ‘I will not,’ but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰He came to the second and said the same thing. The second son answered, ‘I will go, sir,’ but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?”

They said to him, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Amen I tell you: The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness, but you did not believe him. However, the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him. Even when you saw this, you did not change your mind and believe him.” (EHV)

Theme: Who has done the will of the Father?

1. We often fail.
2. Christ did not.

Parents—you’ve been there before. And kids—you’ve done it before! Parents ask their children to do something, like cleaning their room; and it’s not very often that they actually do it without complaining! They’ll whine and complain about it, and if they actually do it, it’s a half-hearted job at best. Or they might say, “okay, fine” but they blow it off, get busy with something else, and when you check the room is still a mess!

Again, we’ve all been there one way or another; it’s a common occurrence. And Jesus uses this to point out our lack of obedience to our Heavenly Father.

In the parable that Jesus told a man wanted his sons to go and work in their vineyard for the day. The first one flat-out refused, boldly telling his father, ‘no.’ But he felt guilty and eventually he went and did what his Father asked of him. The other Son said that he would go—even respectfully referring to his Father as, ‘Sir.’ But he had no intentions of actually doing what his father wanted, he was just saying what his father wanted to hear, covering up his lack of obedience by buttering up his father.

Jesus then asked a simple question with a simple answer: which one did the will of the Father? The first one. Even though the first son said ‘no’ at first, he actually did what was asked of him. While the second son said all the right things, he was far from the obedient one.

Jesus told this parable on Tuesday of Holy Week. On Monday Jesus cleansed the temple for the second time, overturning the money changing tables because they had made it into a den of robbers. He spent the rest of the day preaching God’s Word to the people. The next morning, he returned to the temple and began preaching again. It was then that the chief priests and the elders of the people questioned Jesus, asking him by whose authority he was doing these things. Jesus responded by asking them a question about John the Baptist’s baptism, which they refused to answer since they rejected everything about John the Baptist. Since they refused to answer, Jesus refused to tell them by whose authority he cleansed the temple and preached in it.

Then Jesus told them this parable. The Jewish leaders were the second son. Outwardly they did all the right things, they looked good to the people. They were sure to tell everyone the good they were doing, even adding laws on top of God’s commands to show how sincere they were. They made a public show of fasting, made sure everyone saw how much they prayed. They thought they were better and more righteous than others.

But they didn’t really follow God; they weren’t really righteous because they rejected Christ.

They were so busy with their own man-made laws that they forgot all about God and his Word.

When Jesus called them out on their hypocrisy, they got upset and refused to repent. They

constantly clashed with Jesus because his teaching of the gospel undermined their ministry and their way of life. Again, they were the second son who outwardly looked good, but in reality refused to follow the father's will.

Then there was another group of people—tax collectors and prostitutes. They are like the first son, who at first didn't obey and honor the father. Tax collectors were known as cheats, who stole from their own countrymen on behalf of the Roman government. Prostitutes, obviously, were considered some of the lowest of the low. But these are the type of people who heeded the call to repentance, turned from their sins, and believed in Jesus for forgiveness.

Matthew, who wrote the gospel was a tax collector when Jesus called him to be his disciple. We also think of Zacchaeus, the short man who climbed a tree to see Jesus. He is called a chief tax collector. He too repented and promised to give back four times the amount that he stole.

As far as prostitutes go, we think of Rahab in the Old Testament, and a woman labeled as "sinful" washed Jesus' feet with her tears and hair; but we do not have a specific example of a prostitute repenting of her sin and following Jesus, although there obviously were. And in a way, tax collectors and prostitutes can be seen as representative of all those who have caught in sin but have repented and turned to Christ in faith.

John the Baptist was the forerunner for Christ. He prepared the people for Jesus' coming by preaching repentance. He said, **repent because the kingdom of heaven is near.** And, **produce fruit in keeping with repentance.**

But the Jewish spiritual leaders, the chief priests, and the elders of the people, rejected John the Baptist and refused to listen to his message. They didn't see a need to repent of their sins—they were better than anyone else. And if you are good enough on your own, what do you need a Savior for? And so, they rejected Jesus as the long-promised Savior.

Some sinners, however, like the tax collecting thieves, and prostitutes, felt the guilt of their sins. They knew that they deserved nothing but God's wrath and punishment not only for their sinful professions, but for all the other sins they commit each and every day. And so, they listened to John the Baptist. They heeded his call for repentance, and they believed in Jesus as the Savior of the world and trusted in him for salvation! And through faith in him they received the gifts of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven that Christ won for us by his death and resurrection.

Which son are you? Are you like the second son, or the Jewish leaders, or are you like the first son, or the tax collectors and prostitutes? If you are honest with yourself, you probably aren't completely like either son, rather you have some tendencies of both.

At times, we may think and act like the second son, or the Jewish leaders. We say all the right things, but struggle to actually do the right things. We also have the tendency to look down upon others. "I'm worshiping today, unlike many people; and I'm worshiping in person—that means I just care more than others!" We become self-righteous with a holier-than-thou attitude. We puff out our chests and boast and brag about who we are, what good we've done; all the time we've spent in Church or volunteering our time and talents for the gospel. But much of it is all smoke and mirrors. We appear good on the outside, but in reality we often fail to obey the Lord and to do the work in his kingdom.

We also have tendencies like the first child, or the tax collectors and sinners. You think back at your life and about all the horrible things that you have done. You shake your head and think to yourself, "how can I have been so foolish?" And maybe those memories aren't so distant, but are relatively recent. How many times have you said, "No" to our God by doing things you know are wrong?

Which son obeyed the Father? The first one, of course. However, you could also say, neither. Both of them failed to honor their Father; both sinned against him. And frankly, that's all of us.

Whether you tend to be more like the first son or the second, we still fail to obey the Father's will.

But not Jesus—not God's one and only Son. As God it is not possible for him to sin against himself. He kept all of the commandments perfectly. Not once did he fail to obey the Father's will; but was completely righteous. Not once did he fail to honor the Father, talk back to him, or even tell him 'no.' It probably wasn't going to be pleasant to work in the vineyard, and that's why the son told his father 'no' before eventually going; while the other son never went. But that wouldn't have been as nearly as unpleasant as the cross! Think of all the physical pain that Jesus endured after his arrest—he was beaten, struck in the face, crowned with thorns, and flogged before his hands and feet were nailed to a cross upon which he hung until he died. Plus there is the emotional pain—he was ridiculed by the very people he was sent to save, they mocked him for saying he was a king, for performing miracles and saving people's lives, they blind-folded him and spit on him. All but one of his disciples deserted him, and his closest disciple denied that he even knew who Jesus was. Then there was the weight of all our sins upon his shoulders. That's what happened on the cross—the Lord put the guilt of all our sins upon Jesus when he was on the cross so that he could suffer for our sins our place and die to pay for those sins. The guilt of every sin that has ever been committed was suffered by Jesus on the cross. But worst of all would have been the literal hell that Jesus suffered through. Because he became guilty of all our sins, he was forsaken by his Father. It was at that moment that Jesus suffered through the eternal damnation that we deserve. We can hear the pain and anguish in Jesus' voice when he cried out, **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

Jesus knew all of this was going to happen and how unpleasant it was going to be. He knew this from eternity. But he didn't flee from it, he didn't tell his Father, "No." Instead, he willingly gave up the glories and riches of heaven and became one of us to serve as our substitute. When the time was drawing near we read that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem, heading to the place of his death, which he prophesied about again and again. In the Garden of Eden prayed that the cup of suffering which was about to experience be taken from him if it was the Father's will. But it was the Father's will that he die for us the way he did, so he allowed himself to be arrested and eventually crucified.

Jesus knew how horrible it would be to pay for our sins, but he obeyed the will of his Father and willingly did it! He always obeyed the will of the Father, living a perfect life. He led a perfect life so that he could give his perfect life to us! Because not only did we have to have our sins paid for, but also need to be perfect. So Jesus took his righteous perfection and credited to us so that we are righteous, or perfect and holy in the eyes of the Lord!

It is only by the grace of God, then, that we are who we are and can stand before the Lord without fear of consequence! Not only is everything Christ has done for us a gift of grace, but so is the work of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is the one who brought us to faith through the gospel—whether in Word or baptism; and it is the only Spirit that strengthens that faith and keeps us in that one true faith through that same gospel—whether in Word or in the Lord's Supper.

And it is this faith in Christ that receives all the blessings that Christ won for us. Through faith in Christ alone we are forgiven, receive God's declaration of us being not guilty, and the sure hope of eternal life in heaven!

Who has done the will of the Father? It's not us. We know the guilt of our sins; we know what we deserve and the importance of repentance. So, we confess our sins, hear the words of forgiveness, and praise God for his grace and mercy in forgiving us for Jesus sake! We may not do the will of the Father, but Jesus has for us; and so it's as if we do keep the will of the Father! And now, having tasted God's grace and mercy, we try as best as we can to live a life pleasing to him! Amen.