

Our Encouragement in Christ

Matthew 21:23-32

Philippians 2:1-18

Grace, Peace, and Mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

This gospel made me think about a t-shirt I saw some time back. The wording on the front is, "I love (love shown as a red heart) my attitude problem." The two sons in Jesus' parable would wear this shirt with pride.

The first son has a big mouth. Says what is on his mind, does not care if his words hurt you. You are going to hear it whether you want to or not. We call him stubborn, rebellious, even disrespectful toward his father. "I will not go and work in the vineyard."

The other son is a smooth talker. Says what he thinks you want to hear. He will say things to please you. Make promises with no intention of keeping them. "Yes father, I will go and work in the vineyard". When his father finds out that his son broke his promise, he would talk his way out of that as well. You know the type.

"Which of the two sons did the will of his father?" And the answer is, really neither did the will of his father. Both have a bad attitude. As parent neither would make me happy. Yet there is a difference between the two sons. From the point of view of the Jewish leaders the first son did do the will of the father. Jesus certainly doesn't disagree with their answer. The first son not only eventually went to work in the vineyard, he "Changed his mind." He repented.

Repentance simply means, "A change of mind," a change of attitude. The way life had been going is not working and I change my mind to go in a different direction. With repentance I realize that the sinful life, with the bad attitude is not working out and I need God to save me. It is an admission that I cannot get myself back to the right place with God. So, I turn to God and confess my sins, how I have tried to live without Him. I have been disobedient. The two sons were not in the right place with their father. That relationship with their father was broken. When we repent, we realize that and confess our sin and that puts us in the right place to receive God's gift of forgiveness and the restored relationship with God. The first son eventually got there.

How about you and me? Would any of us wear that shirt with pride? I have my days. The mouthy son with a bad attitude, not wanting to do what I am told or even asked, always questioning God and His ways. Maybe I am the smooth talker with a bad attitude, always saying the right things, but without any intention of following through or keeping my promises. I am out of place. A child who wants to be a parent, an employee who wants to be boss, or worse, A Christians who wants to be God. A change of attitude is desperately needed.

So, what does an attitude that shows we are right with God? It is right here in Paul's letter to the Philippians. These are attitudes we don't see in either of the sons. But these are attitudes that Jesus would like in us. "Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Jesus Christ." This what a changed mind looks like. Or a changed attitude in Christ. It is an attitude of humility. To humble one's self. Not to think you are better than others. To have each other's interests and wellbeing in mind. That is quite a difference from what the two sons are showing. Paul is talking about an elf-emptying for the other. It is pouring out of our life. As we look in the mirror of scripture, is the reflection pretty? Or are you in for an attitude adjustment? Paul's point as always is look to Christ. Look at Jesus's attitude who did not count equality with God as something to be exploited. Who emptied Himself and became human, took the form of a servant? Humbled Himself, became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God highly exalted Him, raised Him from the dead. The Son of God who gave up everything loses nothing. The will of the Father is to give us forgiveness and life in His Son's name. To give us all that He has. To raise us up and to give us His kingdom.

Well what do you think? The real miracle comes when there is transformation in me. When my attitude problem

becomes something else that is Christ-like. A giving and concern for my neighbor. When my selfishness turns to concern for the other. I suppose that is what happened to the first son. Something got a hold of him and he changed his mind or his attitude. We call this grace.

I love the way Paul begins this chapter two, "If there is any encouragement in Christ." It is the motivation of the love of God in Christ. Can anything but the grace and love of our Lord Jesus change us into the people He calls us to be. To Move us toward and have our minds shaped into a Christ-Like attitude. As Christ begins to work in us, he begins to work through us. His light begins to shine. A friend of mine on the way to lunch saw a man serving a prison term on work release working the landscape around the office. He would stop and take some time a speak to him and listen to his life story at lunch. My friend took time to listen and pray, sometimes missing lunch with his buddies. After some time this prisoner started to go to the services offered by the prison chaplain. One day the prisoner told my friend he had turned to Christ, and wanted to become an engineer just like him when he got released. The prisoner credited my friend's encouragement and time he spent with him. This gives us a glimpse of what Christ can do our with our words and actions.

What do you think? Well, the Jewish officials had to be surprised at who gets exalted and given the kingdom. The tax collectors and prostitutes who had their lives, minds and attitudes changed by the transforming gospel of the love of Christ.

So it is the littlest thing or action done in Christ that can have a life changing impact on others. As Paul would say you forgiven people, God is at work in you. Maybe the trickle of God grace started here can turn into a flood of God's grace and mercy throughout this community.

Maybe you have heard the Story of a mother who took her young son who was a budding pianist to a concert of a Piano Master. They found their front row seat which was just under the Grand Steinway on stage. When the mother got involved in a conversation with the person next to her, her child sneaked off and sat on the bench at the grand piano. When the lights came up on stage the mother looked and to her horror found her child in the spotlight. He began playing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, as the grand master came out. The mother wanted to get her son off stage, but the grand pianist whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit." Then he sat beside the young boy and with the left hand added a harmony. The right arm wrapped the boy as the right added an improvisation. The audience sat enthralled. That is encouragement

Encouragement in Christ. In our lives as rough and unpolished as they may be, and at times reluctant as we are, or even discouraged as we feel, our Lord and master surrounds us whispering in our ear, "Don't quit." As we keep at it our Lord takes what we have and augments and adds until a work of beauty comes forth. He takes what little we may have and uses it change our mind and our attitude and our way of doing, leading us to the right place with God until he forms us after Himself.

What do you think of a Lord and master like that? With a Lord and savior all the bad attitudes in this world would not stand much of a chance.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard our hearts and minds in Christ. Amen.