

“The call for the workers to work.” (19)

I heard a story about a woman and her husband who had to interrupt their holiday to go to a dentist. When they finally found a dentist the woman said, “I want a tooth pulled, and I don't want any injections because I'm in a big hurry.” She went on to say to the dentist, “Just extract the tooth as quickly as possible, and we'll be on our way.” The dentist was quite impressed and said, “You're certainly a courageous woman, which tooth is it?” And so the woman turned to her husband and said, “Show him your tooth, dear.”

I guess the point is that when it comes to courage we are always good at asking others to be courageous but are we courageous enough to learn from God's word and have the sin extracted from our lives. Turn your Bibles to **Matthew 21**. The parable we are going to look at today is extraordinary in the way it reveals Jesus as the Master teacher.

Gathered around Jesus was a group of Jews who were seeking Jesus' destruction. And as we know the Jews always had a problem accepting Jesus' authority and so Jesus tells them a story and asks them their opinion of it. And as we were going to read in a minute we will see that the answer they gave was perfectly correct but what they didn't realise was the stories implications. It wasn't until Jesus had finished telling the story until they realised the story was about them. They had accused themselves and so fixed their own punishment.

We are going to look at “The parable of the two sons” today, so let's go ahead and read it. **Matthew 21:28-32** “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. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “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. 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.”

Now I want to break this parable into **three focus points** this morning and the **first focus point** I want us to look at is “The call”. Jesus asks the Jewish leaders a question, He asks them in **verse 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.’”

One of the first things that strikes you when you read this parable is the direct way the father approaches his sons. He feels he has the right to ask them both to go and work in his vineyard; He speaks to both sons in the kindest of terms and says, “**Son go work.**” Jesus says in **Matthew 21:30**, “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing.”

And it's in this way that God as the Father gently calls all men and that's because it is God who is ever seeking workers. It's God who takes the initiative to bring the inactive and indifferent into His vineyard. That's what Jesus meant when He says in **John 6:44**, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

It is God who draws people to the Saviour, **and how does He do this?** Not through a weird dream, not through a fascinating vision, not through an Ouija board, not through a crystal ball. **So what is His drawing power?** Read on in **verse 45** of **John 6**, “It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.”

God draws people to the Saviour through teaching. **2 Thessalonians 2:14** “He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” People are brought near to the fountain of grace when they learn and receive and submit to the Gospel of Christ.

I read in a newsletter a few months ago the story about when **Dr. David Livingstone** was working in Africa and a group of friends wrote him: They wrote in the letter, “We would like to send other men to you. Have you found a good road into your area yet?” And according to a member of his family, **Dr. Livingstone** sent this message in reply, “If you have men who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all.”

Now the father who had only two sons asked each of them to work, He didn't say it was easy work, but they were called to work. And listen loved ones God's call goes out to all His children.

It's as worldwide as human flesh; it's as all pervading as human needs. Jesus said in **Matthew 11:28** "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." God's call to His children and speaks to the cheerless and the downtrodden. He summons each and every one of us to preach the Gospel in all nations. Not a single soul is to be left out and that's because the call is universal and individual. And when you read your Bible you will find that He calls me and He calls you one by one. He wants all His children to enter His vineyard and when a person refuses to go in, then they are flatly refusing to acknowledge His authority.

Now does God call us to become Christians, and then for us to just sit around and enjoy the blessings of a Christian life? **No!** Of course He doesn't, that's the **second focus point**. 'The call from God is a call to work.'

A minister was once asked by his friend, whom he met whilst on holiday, "How many members do you have in your church?" The minister replied, "One thousand." His friend said, "Really and how many of them are active?" The minister replied, "All of them." He said, "Around two hundred of them are active for the Lord, the balance are active for the devil."

In which category do you lie in? More importantly where do you lie in the Lord's sight? Jesus said in **Matthew 12:30**, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." You see loved ones if you are for Jesus then you will work for Jesus, when God calls you; it's not to rest and ease. The father's desire was for his sons to work, that's why he called them.

In Tennyson's poem "The Lotos eaters", he retells the story found in the 'Odyssey of Ulysses' visit to an enchanting land that was 'always afternoon'. 'And it's there that the sailors came and ate of the unusual lotos plant and after tasting its sweet fruit, all they wanted to do was sleep and dream and live with half shut eyes. They had lost all desire to return to their homeland and were perfectly content to recline on the hills with their dreams'.

And loved ones many people who are in Christ's kingdom are like that, but let me ask you, **are you like that?** You see some people don't realise what being a Christian demands. They have entered the Lord's church like people run to a shelter to escape a storm and when they are inside they just stand around and watch it rain.

Now it is true that there's a certain measure of safety and security in the church. But the church, like a vineyard, is a place of work and all those inside the vineyard should engage in its programme of work. Many Christians only spend about **15 or 20 minutes** a week on the job. You see the father's call had a sense of urgency about it, He says in **verse 28**, "Son, go and work today." In other words there was work, which needed to be done, and it needed to be that day.

So Christ's call is for men and women to who will work for Him today. That is after all, all the time that there is, it is our one chance, our opportunity to serve. **2 Corinthians 6:2** "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation." If we hold back and put off, if we wait until tomorrow to do the work of today, the chances are the work won't get done and so in effect we are like the son who bluntly said to his father in **verse 29**, "I will not."

And that brings us to the **third focus point**, "The workers." Let's look at the **2nd son first**. Now notice how polite and respectful he replies to his father's request. **Matthew 21:30**, "I will go, sir." Although his brother might refuse his father, he wouldn't, he would go, how courteous he is, how sure of success he is. **But why then did he fail his father?** **Matthew 21:30** says that, "He did not go."

It's not that he deliberately deceived his father. He's not worked out some plot of intrigue by which he hoped to bankrupt his father. He may not have even been trying to purposely lie to his father. He failed his father because in his father's presence he probably intended to go, but in his father's absence he found that the **doing** of the task was more difficult than the **saying** of the words.

James 1:22-25 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does."

You see this son represents the large host of Christ would be followers who profess much but practice little. Many people pledge their loyalty to the Master and then they fall down on their pledge. They praise love but don't practise love. It's like a profession without practice, a promise without performance.

And when people have this type of attitude, they continue to be the greatest enemy of the cause of Christ.

Gandhi who was born a Hindu but studied many other religions wrote in his autobiography about several disappointing trips to South Africa. He said, “The church did not make a favourable impression on me. The sermon seemed to be uninspiring. The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious. They were not an assembly of devout souls, but they appeared rather to be worldly-minded people going to church for recreation and in conformity to custom.” He goes on to say that, “He could not go on like this and he would soon give up attending the service.”

What do people think when they come to Great Barr to worship our God? Do they see people trying their best to glorify God and serve Him with all of their hearts, minds and soul? Or do they see a bunch of people who just like hanging out together like some social club?

Let’s look at the 1st son. The first son refused his father and rudely said in verse 29 “I will not go.” This son offered no reason or no excuse, he simply wasn’t going. Isn’t the world full of people like this? When the Father calls them to enter His kingdom, they bluntly refuse to enter. They say things like, “I won’t have anything to do with any kind of church!”

And they think that they excuse themselves of their sins, they don’t? In fact they speak freely of their sins as though a frank confession of their sins can serve as a substitute for their obedience. A person is no less a sinner when they admit they are not a saint. The 1st son made a change for the better; he remembered his ugly mood and the blatant discourtesy he had shown his father.

How many of you have heard the expression, “Oh they must have got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning?” When people say that phrase, it’s usually used as an excuse for someone who is grumpy or in a totally bad mood. And so the idea is if you get off to a bad start in the morning, the rest of the day will be the same.

The 1st son began his day badly but that didn’t mean he had to carry on the rest of the day with the same attitude. He saw no reason to continue in the wrong, so what did he do? He repented. And what did his repentance consist of? Well not just a twinge of sorrow, he could have grieved much without repenting. He repented only when he changed his mind and when he went to work in the vineyard.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 29 that, “The son said, ‘I will not go’ but later he changed his mind and went.” And so it’s now that Jesus asks the Jews in verse 31, “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” In other words which of the two did the will of the Father?

And loved ones there is a lot of emphasis on the word “Did” in that verse, it’s the Greek word poy-eh’-o and it means ‘to agree or make a deal’. It’s the idea of doing something without any delay. In other words Jesus asked the Jews, “Which of the two without any delay done what the father wanted them to do?”

Out of all the questions Jesus could have asked them, He asked them the most important question of all, “Which one did the will of their father?” And according to verse 31, they said “The first,” and answered correctly. You see all else is of no consequence, no matter how good the intentions, no matter how many the promises, the simple fact is that one son did and one son didn’t. Fine words can never take the place of fine deeds and it’s now that Jesus tells them they have just condemned themselves.

He says in Matthew 21:31+32, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 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.”

What an insult this must have been for them, imagine the anger and rage in their hearts as Jesus tells them that these so called unclean people. The people that the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law hated so much were now in a better spiritual condition than they have ever been. I would imagine them fuming, no wonder they wanted to kill Him and get Him out of the way.

Now the meaning of this parable is crystal clear. The first son who wouldn’t work but later decided to work represents the tax collectors and prostitutes or sinners as some translations have it.

All their lives by their wicked deeds they had been saying “No” to God, but when Jesus comes along they could no longer continue in their sin but pressed on to enter the kingdom.

The **second son** represents the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And they were always making the pretense of serving God but when Jesus came along they didn't accept Him as the tax collectors and prostitutes did. They despised His teachings and they hated Him so much they would eventually crucify Him to a cross. They had rejected John the baptiser and they had rejected Jesus as the Christ and wouldn't accept His authority. The tax collectors and sinners had turned from their ways but the Jewish authorities had made no amends and had cast aside the heavenly kingdom.

Now what about you? You see as Christian we are called to work. **What is Jesus going to be looking for when He returns? What does He expect His fellow servants to be doing? Luke 12:35-40** “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Now Christian if you are struggling this morning to find ways to serve Him then let me encourage you to talk to someone about it. Let me encourage you to pray about ways in which you can serve Him. This congregation is serving Him in many different ways and if you want to serve Him in some way we will show you and encourage you to do that. Because Jesus says, **“He expects His servants to be ready for service and already serving.”**

Because from the minute you put Christ on in baptism, you declared to the world that you would choose His will to be done in your life. You were called to work because there is work to be done my friends, lots of work and it starts today, it starts this day.

Now if you're not a Christian this morning then Jesus asks you **“Are you willing to do the Father's will?”** Maybe you have said, **“No quite bluntly to Jesus in the past.”** But just because you got out of bed the wrong way in the morning a few times in your life doesn't mean you have to carry on the rest of your life with the same attitude. You can repent today and change your mind about the way your life is going.

How many of you have heard the name of Frances Jane van Alstyne? She was a woman who was born in New York in 1820 and at six weeks old she lost her eyesight and so was blind. But as with most people who are blind, they develop good hearing skills and their memory seems to be better than most. In fact later on in her life she could memorise the first four books of the Old Testament and the four gospels. Now you probably don't know here as Frances Jane van Alstyne, you probably know her better as Fanny J. Crosby. Now as we know she wrote between 2 and 8 thousand hymns depending which side of the fence you are on.

But she understood what Jesus meant when He said in **Matthew 11:28-30** **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

That's where she got the inspiration for the hymn called, **“Jesus is tenderly calling thee home.”** Listen to the words of **first stanza of the song.** **“Jesus is tenderly calling thee home, calling today, calling today. Why from the sunshine of love wilt thou roam farther and farther away.”** Now listen to the words of the last stanza. **“Jesus is pleading, O list to His voice: hear Him today, Hear Him today. They who believe on His name shall rejoice, quickly arise and obey.”**

You see loved ones Christ is still calling you this day. **Are you going to obey His words in Luke 5:32 where He says, “He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Are you willing to change your mind and then do the Father's will and go to work in His vineyard?**

Are you willing to confess that He is Lord like Romans 10:9 tells us? Do you believe Jesus when He says that God raised him from the dead? Are you willing like some other Jews who wanted to follow their Father's will in Acts 2:41 when they were baptised for the forgiveness of their sins?

Maybe you're someone who is struggling to follow His will because you don't understand His will. Well if that is you this morning then let me encourage you to ask a member of the church here for a personal study. They are free of charge and we can set a time and place which is convenient for you. And together reading only from the Bible, we will search and discover what His will is every one of us.