

## SUNDAY

March 18, 2012

**READ:** Matthew 21: 1-27 (Focus: verses 23-27)

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT:** The chief priests were high-ranking members of the priestly line who joined the high priest in giving oversight to the temple activities. The elders were members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body.

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** In verse 23 what is the primary concern of the chief priests and elders? (See also Acts 4:7 for a similar occurrence.) How does Jesus answer the question put to Him? What person does Jesus ask the priests and elders about? What is the point of bringing this person into the discussion? (see Mt. 11:9)

**KEY CONCEPT:** By answering a question with another question, Jesus often forces people to think deeply about matters in ways that they would rather not, sometimes cleverly pointing out their hypocrisy and invalidating the charges that are being attempted to be placed against Him.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Why do you think that Jesus was being so cagey about answering the chief priests and elders? What was their goal? If they had admitted that John was a prophet, how would that have validated Jesus' authority?

Have you experienced God speaking to you in a way that points out a deceitfulness in your own spirit? Read Hebrews 4:12-13. How has God used the Bible to allow the Holy Spirit to bring a word of reproof and correction to your heart? Has it been effective, causing you to confess and repent of that dishonesty?

**PRAY:** If you have experienced God's voice of correction, but have not dealt with the matter in your heart, take time today to bring the matter before God and allow Him to cleanse you of that sin.

## MONDAY

March 19, 2012

**READ:** Matthew 21:28-31 (focus: verses 28-29)

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** Jesus is setting up a comparison. What is the first element of the comparison in these verses?

**KEY CONCEPT:** There is not a statute of limitations on God's love and mercy.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** When you were a child, did you ever resist what your parents asked you to do? How did you feel about misbehaving in this way? What was their reaction to your behavior?

Can you relate to this scenario of the son changing his mind in your walk with God? What have you done in your life that you know has displeased Him? At what point did you turn it around and decide to honor God? Do you still carry a sense of shame for your initial waywardness? Have you asked God to forgive you for that sin?

**PRAY:** God's mercy is fresh, revitalizing, and available to all who come to Him with a heart of repentance. If you have been trying to turn your life around but have not come to God with a plea of confession, asking for His forgiveness, do so today, and receive the gift of His grace. It does not matter how long past your sin was committed, God stands ready to forgive and welcome you home.

## TUESDAY

March 20, 2012

**READ:** Matthew 21: 28-31 (Focus: verse 30)

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** Today we look at the second part of the comparison being established. What is happening in this verse?

**KEY CONCEPT:** As an ambassador for Christ, failure to live up to our commitments impacts how onlookers understand the nature of Jesus and what it means to be a Christian.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Can you relate to this second son, committing to something, and then not following through with it? Why do people behave in this way? What is the impact on their credibility and reputation? Over time, will people put their trust in someone who does not fulfill their commitments?

As a Christian, what is the impact of saying you believe in Christ, but living in a way that dishonors Jesus...not living out the commands He has given us? Do you know people like this? Does their hypocrisy attract or repel non-Christians from wanting to know Jesus themselves?

How does this type of behavior relate to McLane Church's mission of removing barriers to give people access to Christ?

**PRAY:** Being a Christian does not mean God expects you to be perfect. We can, however, draw upon the Holy Spirit to help us overcome inconsistent lifestyles and personal failings. Change is possible, and it is what God desires for us. Today, ask Him to help you live a life more fully sold-out to honoring your commitments.

## WEDNESDAY

March 21, 2012

**READ:** Matthew 21: 28-32 (Focus: verses 31-32); Matthew 3: 1-12; Luke 7:29-30; 36-50

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** In today's focus verses, what does Jesus use the parable to point out to the priests and elders? What are the two groups that Jesus is referring to by using the parable of the two sons? Why will the tax collectors and prostitutes enter the Kingdom of God first?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Repentance is the key to life change and obedience that triggers the outpouring of God's mercy.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Why does Jesus equate the chief priests and elders to the son who says he will work in the vineyard but does not do so? What do you think they were doing (or not doing) that would cause him to make this comparison? Why do you think they did not respond to John the Baptist's call to repentance as the tax collectors and prostitutes did?

Do you recognize the voice of God when you hear it, as the prostitutes did when they heard John's call to repentance and righteous living? If not, is it because God is not speaking to you, or because there is something hindering your ability to hear His voice? What can you do to help understand what the Lord may want to tell you?

**PRAY:** Our relationship with God, as it is with people, is a two-way street. We need to take time to seek Him...through prayer and Scripture reading. We also need to take time to listen for what He may be telling us...not just give him our list of prayers that we want answered. Be alert...God can speak through our circumstances to get our attention. What is He saying to you this week?

## THURSDAY

March 22, 2012

**READ:** Matthew 21: 28-32 (Focus: James 1: 22-25)

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** How is the instruction in the James passage similar to the two sons in the vineyard? What is the benefit of actually doing what the Bible tells us to do (see James 1:25)? Read Luke 6:46. Can we really call Jesus "Lord" if we are not willing to do what He calls us to do?

**KEY CONCEPT:** If Jesus is truly our Lord, we place ourselves under His authority and do our best to live as He calls us to live. To do otherwise is hypocritical and compromises the integrity of our faith story.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Do you read the Bible mostly for head knowledge, or to let God transform your life in some fashion? What difference does it make whether we read just for information or read it to help shape how we live? As you have read the Bible, has it made a change in your heart? Has that change affected your lifestyle in any fashion? What specific thing(s) are different in your life that you can ascribe to having learned from Scripture and applied it to your life?

Looking forward, what is one thing that you have learned from the Bible that you can apply to your life starting this week that will allow God to work in a new way in you (and through you)?

**PRAY:** If your faith is primarily an intellectual exercise, take the next step in your journey by asking God in prayer to help you know what life changes He would like you to make. Before you read the Bible this week, ask God to speak directly to you through its words. (Helpful Hint: do a Google search on "Commands of Jesus" and print out a list to keep in your Bible.)

## FRIDAY

March 23, 2012

**READ:** Matthew 21: 28-32  
(Focus: Luke 18: 9-14)

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** What is the parallel theme between the Matthew and Luke passages?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But through repentance, we have hope...and indeed assurance...of God's loving mercy.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Do you tend to relate more to the Pharisee or the tax collector in this parable from Luke 18? Why? Can we tell the difference between a truly humble spirit and false humility in ourselves? Why is it important that we do this?

What is it that causes a person to become self-righteous? How is our perception of reality skewed when we allow pride to take root and grow in our spirit? What can we do to bring our heart and spirit back in line with God when it is out of alignment?

**PRAY:** Prayer is the key to allowing God to help you to ground your spirit and guard against pride establishing itself. Find some key Bible verses to start your cleansing prayer. Here are two to get you started: Psalm 51:10 & Psalm 139:23-24. Don't rush...

## SATURDAY

March 24, 2012

**READ:** Matthew 21: 28-32

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** In this parable from Matthew (and the chapters that follow it), how was Jesus bravely standing up against the power of that time? Why did He do this? Do you think it made a difference to those he was speaking to? Did He know the risk He was taking?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Jesus spoke truth to power at great risk. There may come a time in our lives when God wants us to take a stand for Him that could put us at risk in some fashion.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Have there been times in your life when you have kept silent about something when you could have spoken up about it? What kept you silent? Have you had thoughts about it since...wishing you could have that day over again to do things differently?

In the military, men and women willingly put their lives on the line to defend our nation. Have you put important things in your life at risk in order to take a stand for what is right? What has been the consequences of those actions?

Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani is currently on death row in Iran for the "crime" of converting to Christianity from Islam. Would you be willing to put your own life at risk rather than recanting your faith in Christ?

**PRAY:** If we are in Christ, we know that regardless of what happens to us, Jesus is with us and we will be with Him through eternity. Take time to pray today that should the time come, God will help you have the will to stand for what is right, even if it may cost you dearly to live out your convictions with the courage.

TEACHINGS THAT GOT HIM

KILLED

Personal Devotional Guide :: March 18 - 24, 2012  
McLane Church :: Erie County, PA