

Sermon Notes – September 27, 2020

“Actions Speak Louder Than Words”

Matthew 21:23-32

Would you pray with me? Holy and Gracious Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight and may we truly know the presence of the Lord is in this place. Amen.

Sometimes there are times when we are more filled with “talk” and little action. Sometimes we are blind to God’s activity in our midst.

I want to share a funny story with you, but so true of how our words and actions sometimes don’t match. A man was very sick; he’d been in the hospital for a week; he wasn’t getting any better and all of a sudden, he told his doctor, “Please doc, do everything you can to get me well.” And the doc said, “I’ll do the best I can.” Well, about two weeks later, the man got better and he went home from the hospital. He went back to work; he was out playing golf. One day, a few weeks later, he and his wife were in a restaurant and this same doctor (who had helped heal him) was also there with his wife. The doctor came up to him and said, “Sir, how are you feeling?” He said, “Man, I feel good! You did a good job. I’m back at work. I’m playing golf. I’m doing all the things I love to do! I feel great! Thank you, doc for what you and your staff did.” The doctor said, “Sir, I just wanted to remind you of a promise that you made when you were sick.” The man said, “A promise? What promise did I make when I was sick?” The doctor replied, “Well you promised me that when you got well, that you would give \$10,000 to the building fund for the new hospital wing.” The man said, “Say whaaaat? Man, I must have been sick and delirious! I would never have done that!” ... And he never did.

How many times do we make promises to God? Sometimes we make them when we are sick, when we’re in a bad situation and other things and our good intentions never get off the ground. Jesus confronted the religious leaders (the scribes and the Pharisees) with their words. You see, they professed love for God; they talked of God; they knew all the right things; they were going through the right motions... But God knew,

in their heart, they didn't have a love for God or a passion for God. They weren't serving with the right reasons. They were filled with words, but their actions did not match their words. Jesus confronted them in our story today. They confronted Jesus about his authority and Jesus told them, "I am not going to tell you. I'm not going to get in this debate because I know what you are wanting to do." Jesus then proceeded to give them a story about a father having two sons.

The father asked one son to go out and work in the vineyard and he said, "Nope, I'm not going." We don't know if he was busy with his friends; he just didn't want to go; he wanted to sleep in bed that day; whatever reason, he didn't go. But, then it says, *he changed his mind* and he went. The better Greek translation of that passage is that "he changed what he cared about and he went." So he went to work in the vineyard. The second son said, "Yes, I'll go." He was polite; he was mannerly; but he did not go. Have you ever met people that will always tell you, "Yes, I'll do it"? They don't ever argue; they don't ever protest; they always say they'll do it... but it's almost impossible to get them to do it. They just don't show up.

Well, the scribes and the Pharisees were kind of like that. They went through the motions of religion; they knew about God; they knew the history of God; they could talk about God; they professed God, but he was far from their hearts.

I don't want you to worry about which one of the sons in the story that we're most like, as much as I want you to see that both of these sons were at fault. Some would say the first son was like the tax collectors and the prostitutes -- they at first resisted the gospel; they would say, "No. I don't want anything to do with Jesus." But, then they relented, changed their mind, and went to work in the vineyard; they repented when they heard John the Baptist. They came to believe in Jesus and it changed their lives.

The second son in Jesus' story was like the scribes and the Pharisees. "Yeah, I'll do it." But they did not. Their words and their actions didn't

match. Jesus said to them, “You have heard John the Baptist preach and you rejected him. You even watched the tax collectors and the prostitutes and their lives changed and you still didn’t change or believe. But God is full of mercy and He’s patient.”

Do you know who should have understood that story real well? ... the scribes and the Pharisees because they were a patriarchal society and when a father came to them and asked them to do something, they were to obey it. In our gospel story today the father asked the sons to do something and one said, “No” and then relented and went and the other son said, “I will” but did not go. It would be a shame and pure disobedience to your father in Jewish society to treat your father as both of these sons did – because you were to obey your father, honor him and respect him. But the difference in the two was the one that said “No” and later changed his mind and went and did what his father asked. But note this -- that was not the scribes or religious leaders -- they were stubborn and hard-headed; they were blind to God at work amidst them. John the Baptist had preached to them and here were tax collectors and prostitutes whose lives were changing, but it didn’t affect the religious leaders. Sometimes, I think Jesus is saying to us that we are kind of like those scribes and Pharisees. We are kind of stubborn and hard-headed, and we are often blind to God’s activity in our midst.

I have to tell you a funny story. When I was in college, I would go home on the weekends because I had a job back there. I caught a ride from somebody from the college and my sister-in-law would give me a ride back on Sunday evening. On Sundays, I would go to my home church. My brother and his wife had kind of gotten out of church for a while and they liked to sleep on Sunday morning. I’d get up and crank up my old Ford Falcon. Have you ever had one of those cars that was temperamental in the winter and wouldn’t crank when it was cold? Well, I’d get up and that car wouldn’t crank at 9:00 in the morning. Guess what? ... when I went out there at lunch time, it would crank. On the Sundays when it wouldn’t crank, I went and tapped on my brother’s bedroom door. I said, “Howard, I need a ride to church.” I could hear him telling his wife, “Honey, get up and take her to church.” And, so, she

would get up and take me to church. At lunchtime, he would go out there and sure-as-the-world, that car would crank up. Well, this went on for three Sundays in a row. Every Sunday, my car wouldn't start at 9:00. On the third Sunday, guess what he said? ... "Sis, do you think God is trying to give me a message?" I said, "Yeah. Get out of that bed and go to church."

Sometimes we miss God's activity in our lives because we're blind to it. We're hard-headed. We're stubborn. We're waiting for one more thing to convince us of God's activity in our lives.

Sometimes we are full of words and not enough action. You know, God wants us to keep our word. ***He wants us to show it by the way we live in our actions.***

Some of you may or may not know that Abraham Lincoln, long before he was President of the United States, was a businessman. He and a business partner ran a General Store. What you may not know is that this General Store had some financial problems because of bad investments and mismanagement. They were about to go under financially. His business partner died before they could retire the debt. Abraham Lincoln had to make a decision whether he would pay that debt or leave town, because in those days, when somebody owed money and couldn't pay it back, they just skipped town and went somewhere else. But Abraham Lincoln didn't. It took him 15 years to pay that debt, but he went to the bank and told them that he would pay every bit of it. And he did. *He kept his word and he showed it by his actions.*

The late C.S. Lewis was a pastor, a professor, and a theologian. He wrote several books, "Mere Christianity," "The Chronicles of Narnia," and others. When he was in the British Military during World War I, he served with a man who was married and had children. His buddy said, "If anything happens to me in battle, will you promise me, C.S., that you will take care of my wife and kids? You will make sure that my child is okay until she is 18?" C.S. Lewis promised him in the heat of battle that if something happened, he would take care of his wife and kids. After the

war was over, he did just that. C.S. Lewis wrote this in his autobiography: “I have never met a soldier’s wife who was more ungrateful, rude, and arrogant than that soldier’s wife. Many times I wanted to quit supporting her and that child, but I didn’t because of the promise I made to my army buddy. I waited until she was 18 to quit supporting them.” *He kept his promise. He was good about his actions.*

Sometimes we are full of words and not enough action. Do you remember the play or the movie, “My Fair Lady?” At the end of the play or the movie, there’s a scene in which Liza Doolittle sings these words, “Words, words, words. That’s all I hear. I’m sick of words. All I hear every day is words from him and you. Is that all you blighters can do? Don’t talk to me about the sun shining down from above. If you love me, just show me! Never do I want to hear another word. I have heard every word that there is to hear. Don’t talk to me about love lasting through time. Make me no vow of undying love. Just show me. Show me, now, your love.” ***I wonder if God doesn’t tell that to us sometimes -- “Show me your love, don’t just tell me. Show it to me by telling others about me, by loving others and serving others, by being obedient.”***

You see, the sins of these sons and our sin sometimes is disobedience. *We don’t honor and respect Jesus’ authority in our lives with our obedience as well as our actions. Sometimes we are blind to his activity in our lives. Sometimes we are too full of talk and not enough action.* How many times have we ever said to God, “God, when I’m not so busy; when I’ve got more time; when I’m retired; when my kids are grown and gone; God, when I’ve got enough money; when I’ve done this, Lord, I will serve you. I will live for you.” God wants to see it in action. “Show me, don’t tell me your words. Show it to me.” ***I want you to remember something and that is - that God is more concerned about what you and I do and who we’re becoming than what we say or who we’ve been.*** Did you catch that? God is more concerned about what you and I do and who we’re becoming than what we say or who we’ve been.

Those tax collectors and prostitutes knew what they had been - all their life - and then they changed. God was concerned with what they were

doing then, in the present, and who they were becoming, in the present and the future. The religious leaders were still stuck on who they'd been their whole life - with title and position and prestige and power and wealth - and just going through the motions. God doesn't want us to be stuck in the motions. He wants us to know him personally. You see, the scribes and the Pharisees knew about him, but they didn't know him in their hearts.

When I was a college student and preparing for ministry, I thought I would go into foreign missions. I often heard stories of foreign missionaries who would come and talk about how open people were to come and hear the gospel and how much they wanted to live for Jesus and the changes in their lives. When I got into college, I said that I wasn't sure which ministry I wanted to go into and my professor said, "Peggy, look into youth, children, education, and all these different avenues of ministry." And, I did. I found my calling and it was in the local church, not in foreign missions -- that is, because we all need to grow in knowing Jesus. Sometimes, even in the church, we have become too familiar, we take God for granted and we go through the motions rather than knowing Jesus in our hearts and living out the Christian faith. Jesus doesn't want just our words, he wants our actions. "Show me," as Liza Doolittle says. God says to us, "Show me." ***Honor God the Father with your obedience. Let others see your respect and honor for him by the way you live. Tell others about him - what he's done in your life. Love others. Serve him. Don't put it off. Don't say, "One day, when I have time." Do it now. "Show me," Jesus said.***

Would you pray with me? Holy and Gracious God, you have called us to show you by the way we live. Help us to be more obedient rather than disobedient. Thank you, Father, that you are patient; you are faithful - you are kind and merciful. Thank you, Lord, that your mercy is limitless - your love is unconditional and your grace is amazing. Help us, Father, to never take it for granted but to live for you. In your name, I pray. .. And all God's children said, "Amen."