

"GO WORK TODAY IN MY VINEYARD"

"A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard" (Matthew 21:28).

Quite frequently we need to be admonished to do the things we know we ought to do. There is a very important place in the gospel ministry for teaching people, from the Word of God, what they ought to do; and a place also for exhortation: when people have thus been taught what they ought to do; to persuade them, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to implement their promises, to fulfill their vows, to pay their vows unto the Lord, in the presence of all His people: to do what they have known they ought to do.

This is ~~my~~^{your} purpose in this service. For this reason I take to the parable of our Lord in which He told of the two sons to whom a similar word was addressed: "Go work today in my vineyard." Let us look into this story, which our Lord told, and see ~~that~~ application it has for us.

Let me begin by saying that there are obligations, as well as privileges, involved in the relationship that is assumed in the words, "A certain man had two sons." The text does not say "slave." A slave works from fear, and God doesn't want fear-driven Christians. They render tainted service. It doesn't say "servant". A servant works for hire or wages. I am not serving the Lord for pay or reward. I work for God because I am His son and I love Him. A slave works for fear. A servant works for wages. But a son works for love. God spoke to the two and addressed each of them by the title of "son". It is a great and high privilege to be born from above, to be a child of God, and to work for Him. For these things we should thank God.

I remind you that sonship carries with it a corresponding obligation. As sons we are under obligation to do something. Occasionally we will hear somebody speaking scornfully of the "idle rich". Well, if people are rich, they are to be congratulated. But if they are idle they are to be commiserated. No one has any right to be idle. A foolish Englishman, who, when asked how he liked Canada replied, "Oh, very well. It is a fine country. But you have no gentlemen here." "Oh," said the loyal Canadian, "I think we have a great many. Have you not been treated politely?" "Oh, yes! I don't mean gentlemen in that sense. I mean people who don't work." The Canadian replied, "Oh! We have plenty of that class here, but we call them 'tramps'." There are many religious tramps--they boast of their sonship, but they do not work. Christians do not have any right to be idle. Those who are trophies of grace and heirs of glory ought not be classified among the idle rich. That is a phrase that is commonly used when people speak of those who have so much money they do not have to work for a living. It sometimes happens that the children of a rich man do not learn to work, and even think that they do not need to work. Every child should be taught to work, he should learn that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat. Because God our Father has vast estates, none of His children need go away from home to find something to do. He said, "Go work today in my vineyard." That means that every Christian should be busily engaged in His vineyard. If you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and have become one of His children, then you ought to be busy doing His will. It is not enough to profess faith in Christ, and join the church, and then fold your arms and say: "Well I'm a Christian now. I will be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease." No; we are not called to idleness, but to work. Every one of us ought to be busy in the vineyard of the Lord.

I. The Request.

"Son, go work today in my vineyard." Living for God or doing His will, is

neither a pastime, nor a drudgery, but a delightful, ennobling, and remunerative work for God, for others, and for self. It implies present obedience--"today," and a divinely prescribed activity--"in my vineyard."

God's call to you is personal. "And he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard. And he came to the second, and said likewise.'" While it is the same call to everybody, each one is singled out and spoken to individually. God speaks in a clear accent, and, if we listen, we can distinguish it from the world's tempting voices which fill the air. God's calls are personal. There is not a person here, who has really trusted Christ as his Saviour, who has not been called of God Himself to some particular task. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Every real Christian has a particular task to do. If you are not working at the task to which God has called you, you are shirking your God-given duty. To every Christian this command is addressed: "Son, go work today in my vineyard." There is no exemption. Everybody in the kingdom of God has a job. To be able to work for the Lord is one of the very greatest privileges, blessings, and responsibilities.

The famous Sir Winston Churchill said that he believed that the greatest measure of a man's greatness was his willingness to accept responsibility. To work in the vineyard of the Lord is the task and responsibility of every child of God. Christian, get under the load, and accept your responsibility. That is your job, and nobody can do it for you. If you are not a busy person in the vineyard of the Lord, if you are not constantly engaged in good works in the name of the Lord, you are not fulfilling the plan of God, and there are good works which God expects you to do, and no one else can do them for you.

Sonship is not incompatible with service. Rather, service is the living expression of sonship. This is in reality a test of one's sonship. No man ever works in the vineyard of the Lord until he becomes a son of God. Sonship is first, then service. True religion is a practical thing. The test of sincerity is not in words, but in deeds; not in profession, but in practice. The Saviour's question is not, "What say ye more than others?" but "What do ye more than others?" Working for the Lord indicates that one has spiritual life, but it is never the means of becoming a child of God. When others see our works of faith, they see our labors of love, patience of hope, and they can perceive that indeed we are the children of God.

God's command, "Son, go work today in the vineyard," brings to mind the statement of Gypsy Smith, the famous evangelist, who said that it would be a good thing if all the churches of the land were closed for a year, and the members were compelled to go out and serve instead of coming in to sit. In former years many church members were going Christians. Now, very, very few church members ever go to any unsaved person and personally witness to him, and try to persuade him to accept Christ as his Saviour.

II. The Refusal.

"He answered and said, I will not." Here is a reasonable request, unreasonably rejected. Excuses for disobeying are bad enough, but a flat refusal to do so is worse. There is no merit in defying God. That son should not have said, "I will not." He should have promptly obeyed his Father's command, but he refused to do so.

The attitude of this son reflects the current attitude towards God of multitudes of professing Christians today. On every hand we see men and

women who are bold and unblushingly defiant of the demands of the Father, and totally disregarding of the commands of Christ. To every child of God he says, "Go work today in my vineyard," but comparatively few obey His command. Many frankly and bluntly say to Him, "I will not do it." Most church members today will quickly say, "I am not going to accept any responsibility." Some of them who say, "I will not," think they are hurting the church of which they are members, or somebody else, but they are actually stunting, dwarfing, and paralyzing their own spiritual lives, and doing more harm to themselves than to anybody else.

Basically, all refusal to obey the Lord is due to lack of love for Him. Love of ease and lack of willingness to leave things outside His vineyard for those that are within are secondary causes. His work must be done promptly--"go work today in my vineyard." Today is the only day of which we are sure, so we must work today. Today is the day of opportunity, the day of need, and the day of responsibility. For today and every other day we must give account to God. This work is to be done in the Lord's way, and for the Lord's glory. If you are not actually and whole-heartedly engaged in work of introducing people to Christ, you are not working in the Lord's vineyard, and cannot claim the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. If your life is barren, it is because you are not working in the vineyard of the Lord. If you want to be a happy, successful, and useful Christian, making a good impression on the world for the Lord, you must work in the Lord's vineyard.

III. The Reconsideration.

"Afterward, he repented, and went." This son very bluntly and disrespectfully said that he would not go. To have carried out his rash vow would have involved base ingratitude, family discord, personal loss, and future trouble. Even though he did wrong by refusing to do the work, which he was commanded to do, he finally changed his mind, or repented, and went to work in the vineyard. As he thought of his father's kindness, and his own personal duty, he decided that he would prove his sorrow for his disobedience and his rude refusal to obey with his father's wishes. However, it would have been so much better that he had never refused, and he had gone to the work immediately. It is always right for the child of God to give prompt and sincere obedience to His command. It is our responsibility to conform to the will of God, regardless of what it is, whether it be the performance of an obscure or a conspicuous duty. If it is the will of God, let us do it as unto Him: "Whatsoever ye do, do ye all to the glory of God."

The second son said, "I go, sir, and went not." He did not mean what he said. He never intended to go and do what he promised. His purpose was to get the approval of his father for the time being, and still enjoy his own pleasure. This son represents many today who say that they will work in the vineyard of the Lord, but never do it. Most professing Christians have declared their readiness to do the will of God, but after they have promised to do it, they did not do so. Many people are like that in their singing. They have heard God's command, "Go work today in my vineyard," and then have sung lustily:

"I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord
O'er mountain or plain or sea,
I'll say what You want me to say, dear Lord
I'll be what You want me to be."

It is easy to get people to say: "I go, sir." But there is no value in saying that unless they actually go. Any person who says: "I go sir," should do just that. In so doing he will find satisfaction in life, be a blessing to others, and glorify the Lord.

"Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey."