

GO, WORK IN MY VINEYARD

Matthew XXI, 28-32

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This parable follows very properly that of the Pharisee and the Publican. That had for its object the instructing us in the proper method of worship. This has to do with the active service of the King. In a sense the two are interblended. "He who truly prays," as Luther says, "labors. But some mute ones there are who pray by their acts."

I think I have seen these two boys of the story. Perhaps they live in your homes; for it is marvellous the difference there is in brothers. Born under the same roof, nourished at the same breasts, receiving the same instructions, smiled upon and fondled by the same mother, guided and commanded by the same father, yet, in all essentials of disposition and career, wide as the poles asunder. How little after all is accounted for by environment and heredity, those modern scientific fetishes.

"From God, from God, we are."

Let me say, too, that if you have in your house a son who says: "I go, sir," and then goes not, you will do well for your own peace of mind and for his lasting good, if you take a stout whip and lay it on until he learns to keep his promises. "A rod for the back of fools." When a young boy's father's name is "Spare the Rod" and his mother's is called "Spoil the Child," that boy has a very poor chance in life. It is cruel kindness to be too lenient with children. So doing you are storing up for yourself and them many sorrows. The one glib with his promises, but failed to carry them out, should be chastised for two reasons.

In the first place, he thinks little of his word, and plays fast and loose with honor and with truth—terribly common sins in their days. Men who loaf when their masters' backs are turned, gamble in stocks with other people's money, or bribe to get into power, are just the boys grown up, who said to father, "I go, sir, and went not."

And in the second place he should be punished because he manifests a selfish and forceful disposition towards those he should hold most dear in the world. Such an one come to more mature years is found absenting himself from the polling booth at elections, ignoring the rights of others, and turning a deaf ear to the claims of foreign missions.

"A man whom none can love, whom none can thank;
Creation's blot, creation's blank."

The other man is a surly fellow, who says ill, but does well. He is the opposite of his brother, who says well but does ill. If there is nothing for us but choice between these, let me have the man who does the right thing at the last, however forbiddine his words, for "actions speak louder than words." Pity he could not say well and do well, too.

But to our story. Notice the father's command: "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." If our senses were not dulled by seeing similar commands so often in holy writ we would wonder at the condescension of the father in speaking such words. The God of the whole earth, in whose hands are all things, asks our help. He calls Himself the vineyard owner, and avers that to get the increase He needs our help. Wonderful honor to be workers with God in the vineyard. I need not tell you how often the figure occurs in 5th Isaiah: "Now will I sing my beloved a song touching his vineyard"—sublime poetry

to set forth this idea. In John 15 Christ is the vine and the Father is the husbandman.

The command of the Father is a beneficent one. Work is good for sons; good for everybody. "If work is God's curse," as one has said, "what must His blessing be?" Work keeps men out of mischief. The idler is a dangerous person. Gossips, harsh critics and all such pests are usually drawn from the class called idlers.

Work trains men to skill. We learn to do by doing. Work makes men happy. The sleep of the laboring man is sweet; and bread earned by brain or hand is doubly precious. As they work men find songs pouring from their lips.

Labor gives men a sense of self-respect. The man who toils has a place in the world and fills it usefully. He is no drone in the hive. He does his share, and can look all men in the face without blushing. The idler has the hardest lot, for his time hangs so heavy upon his hands. He has to kill it else it would murder him with ennui and weariness.

"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." God expects you to work. Each has his work, which if he does not do, will remain undone. And to-day it must be done. To-morrow is not yours, and may never be; and yesterday has gone forever.

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"Son, go work." Can you say there is nothing to do? How much to do; how short the time to do it. A vineyard needed constant care. The weeds must be kept down, the vines pruned, the soil loosened around the roots and the wild animals, which preyed upon the tender branches, had to be driven way or killed.

It is so in the vineyard of your own heart and mind, in the lives of men around, in the church and in the world.

There's plenty to do in this world of ours,

There are weeds to pluck from among its flowers;

There are fields to sow and fields to reap,

There are vineyards to plant upon mountain and steep;

There are forests to plant and forests to fell,

And homes to be builded on hill-side and dell;

Oh! there's plenty to do.

There is plenty around us to do. You notice that it was men the Father addressed; and I think that is true to the facts of human life. In the work of the church men are scarce; they need to be aroused to this needy vineyard's workings, not the women. Women preponderate in the Sunday school, prayer meeting and other institutions of the church. The Women's Missionary Society! When did you ever hear of a Men's Missionary Society? Why not? I should like to see one. If women do the work of the Lord, be not surprised if women wear the crowns.

The reception of the command was disappointing in both instances. The one spoke in a snappish tone, saying, curtly, "No," though he did his Lord's will at the last. The other's words were honeyed, but false. He said "Yes," but his actions said "No." "I go, sir, but he went not."

How common is this experience in our day. If you want ease, let us never deliver our Master's message or summon men to his work, for then we shall

meet disappointment right along. Good works are always hard because they run counter to the natural heart of man. What crowds flock in answer to the invitation to self-pleasing. But how few cry "I go" to the summons to take a Sunday school class, help the temperance cause or to spread abroad the gospel message.

Let us now look as the former of the two sons: He says, "I will not go, but after he goes." The first boy is a blunt fellow, who speaks as a bear but afterwards is meek as a lamb. Some men are just like that in church work. They speak in such a way that we look for nothing from them; but when it comes to the pinch we find them at our back—working manfully, fighting bravely. Judged by their words, one would put them down as obstacles rather than helpers; but see their actions, and they are the right sort after all. Of Dr. Johnson, the great writer, who was sharp and severe in tongue but had a kind heart, Goldsmith said: "There is nothing of the bear about him but the skin."

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How comes a man to act like this? Well, perhaps he does it as a rebuff to his sweet but false brother. Have you not seen this? I have. He makes no pretence to being a good man, and he is keen at detecting those who do make an avowal of being God's servants, and then act inconsistent with such avowal. He is going to hell, but with his eyes open. He has such a large view of the worth of sincerity that he is lost to all other virtues.

But such men, open in their expressed opposition to act, are sometimes as open and earnest in turning to God. "Afterwards he went." "Afterwards"—How long "afterwards"? What determined him to change about? Was his mother dead—without a sight of his conversion—when he turned around? Or had he seen the results of his evil course and been sickened thereby, before he heard the call? In a revival service a very wicked sailor stood up and said: "I take Christ as my Saviour. You all know me and wonder at what I say. I have seen the evil of my life. Lately a man died of delirium tremens and a girl in a house of shame. I led them both into sin."

Some men say "I go not" when they intend to go. They have a sort of shame at being approached on the subject of personal religion, and profess carelessness about it, to rid themselves of the Christian worker, when inwardly they are anxious as to their state and well disposed to plant and service. However it be I hope you will go. The Church needs your help; the Saviour needs you; and for your own good you cannot afford to miss the stimulus of Christian service.

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The other son will now claim our attention. He is a popular youth, very likely, for he is so smooth in language. He says "I go, sir." He would not turn the devil away with a bad answer. Perhaps he longs to be popular with all parties. It is with him "good lord, good devil." Have we not seen such, effusive in kindness, chary in doing kind deeds. Trust them not; they are fooling thee.

Or they are fickle persons perhaps. They mean it when they say "I go, sir"—that is, they mean it when they say it. But it is not long until some other call claims their attention. They are with you while you are with them; with the enemy while in his company. Do not count upon them for they give out but a spark, like flint when it is struck with steel, and like the same flint they straightway are cold again.

Or maybe like Pliable in Pilgrim's Progress, they are turned back by initial difficulties, and held back by ridicule. Ridicule is a powerful weapon;