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WHICH DID THE FATHERS WILL?

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.

"He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented and went.

And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go sir; and went not."

Matt. 21: 28-30/

It is always pleasant and refreshing to meet a man who knows where he is going and what he is going to do when he gets there. It is always surprising how far such a man can go in a set time. Thomas Penn, William Penn's son, once made a treaty with the Indians to secure some new lands for the English settlers. The land was to extend as far in one direction as a man could walk in a day and a half. The Indians, in their simplicity, forgot to say who was to do the walking. The white men picked out a long-legged back-woodsman who clipped off sixty-six miles in the set time. The Indians were surprised and angry, they said the man ran. One old chief expressed the Indian's indignation in this quaint way; "No stop to shoot a squirrel, no sit down to smoke a pipe, but lun, lun, lun all day."

In this parable of the two sons Jesus delivered a sharp rebuke to the religious leaders of His day. When

He finished there was no question in the minds of His hearers as to who the two sons were. The Scribes and Pharisees knew they were the son who said, I go, sir; and went not. Such a method of preaching is very effective when one has skill to use it. How many times Jesus used it.

The method is this: You draw the man's own picture, either alone or in contrast with some one who is much better. The man looks on with keen interest, often with interest sharpened with envy, for he never suspects the picture is his own. Then with an unexpected stroke of the brush the artist makes the picture so much like him he cannot deny it. You can almost hear these men gasp in surprise, as they exclaim, "Oh, so you are talking about us?" It is all the easier for the skillful artist to do this, that our own likeness is the hardest for us to recognize.

Some of the most effective preaching ever done was by this method. How often Sam Jones used it. He would trot a man out on the stage, put him through all his lame paces, pommel him, laugh at him, make the crowd laugh at him, then, with a sudden stroke of wit would show them they had been laughing at themselves. And Sam Joes could do it so skillfully he could make them like it.

This fellow that said, I go sir; and went not, represents a large part of the race. If some great artist were to put him on the stage, put him through all his racking gaits, and show up all his folly and weakness;

before he was through most of us, if we were honest, would cry out, in the language of the old Negro spiritual, "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord."

Every person you meet nowadays is going somewhere, and going in a hurry. But not many really know where they are bound. One of the best conductors we ever had on the Coast Line was Captain Dinkins. He followed the road nearly all his life. When they retired him he said jokingly, "Yes, boys, I have been traveling up and down this road for forty years trying to get people back home. And they are scattered worse now than they were when I started. I am going to quit and go home."

What a picture of human life that is. It is hurry, hurry, hurry, speed, speed, speed, run, run, run, But not very many of us know where we are going. When we get out on the road we break our necks to get where we are going, and when we get there we are in just as big a hurry to leave. If you ask a man seriously where he is bound you will find that this question has received the least thought of any. We are far more concerned with the clothes we wear, the style we go in, and the kind of car we ride in, than we are with our final destination.

Seriously, one of the weightiest questions ever asked a man is, "Where are you going, brother?" One of the most forceful illustrations I ever heard Dr. George Stuart was like this: He first drew a road across the stage, with one end leading to Nashville, the other to New Orleans, and he always placed strong emphasis on which end lead

Nashville. Then he would start down the road towards New Orleans, going so fast his coattails were popping. Suddenly he would stop and cry, "Hey, brother, where are you going?" The man would answer, and it sounded so dumb, "Goin' to Nashville." It was funny, but there was a deep pathos in the story. The most pathetic thing in life is a man or woman going on a journey and not knowing where.

This man said, I go, sir, but he had no set time. Perhaps he really meant to go some time. Irving Cobb tells this funny story. He said one day the owl had a terrible headache. He asked the terrapin to go get him some aspirin. The terrapin said, "All right," and started. The owl waited and waited, but he never did bring him the aspirin. At last, after hours of torture, his head got easy of its self. About six months later he overtook the terrapin one day, and began to abuse him for the way he had acted that day. The terrapin said, "Hold on now, if you say any more I won't even go after your aspirin."

This man went somewhere, but he didn't go to work in his father's vineyard. And the sad part was, he thought the Lord ought to be well pleased with him. Just because he said, "Yes, sir," Some people think if they just say, "Yes, Lord," that fulfills all the Father's will.

But let us turn our attention now to the boy who did not say, "Yes, sir." He said, "I will not." But Jesus said he was the one that did the Father's will. Was it because he said, I will not, that the Lord was pleased with him? Some people have advanced such an

opinion. They say the man who has sown a lot of wild oats makes a better Christian when he does turn than the moral man. Jesus did not say that, and experience does not teach it. A man who has sinned deeply may turn about and live a noble life. But I have never yet heard a good man say that his former sins helped him to be a better man. You never hear a good man refer to his former sins with anything but the deepest sorrow and regret. It is enough to make you doubt the genuineness of a man's conviction to hear him refer lightly to a former sin.

This is one of the things that have lead men into the error of supposing that great sinners make the best Christians when they do turn. When a man really turns his back on sin and error all the sins of his early life are magnified ten fold to him. When he speaks of them he is moved to magnify their blackness. His very hatred of sin will cause him to do this. If you listen to John Bunyan and Sam Jones you will think these men were terribly wicked in thier early life. But judged by the standards of the world their sins were very light. The best men and women of every age were, without doubt, men and women who had never sinned deeply.

Was the Father pleased with him because he was more bluntly honest than his brother, because he did not try to fool himself? Some think the Lord loved hime better because he was frank about the matter. But it is hard to find any advantage for him on such grounds. If he was

frank it was a very brutal frankness and one that did him but little honor. Is a man who promises to pay a debt and then defaults any worse than one who flatly refuses to pay it the first time? If he is there is only a shade of difference.

Some men have built some mighty loose hopes on this theory. They think because they never did promise the Lord anything they owe him nothing. Listen, brother, it doesn't matter whether you have joined God's church or not. You are living out of the same store the church member is. Your account has been running just as long and is just as badly overdue.

How often we hear men who have never made any profession of religion picking on the sin of some poor halting church member, a sin that is only a mole hill to their own. But if his is mentioned he hides behind the excuse that he never promised to do any better. But has always taken his part of the meat and bread. You never see him turning down any of the good things God put here for his children.

What was it that pleased the Lord in this rebellious son? It was the fact that he repented. Did you know that to acknowledge a wrong and truly repent of it was one of divinest things a man or woman can do? There are lots of things called repentance that are worthless, but to truly repent awrong course or act is indeed a noble step. It has been said the divinest thing a man nor woman can do is to forgive a great wrong. Surely the man or woman who can free-

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ly forgive is most kin to God. It is always the man or woman who has deeply repented of his own wrong that can best forgive a wrong. Having much forgiven, it is easy to forgive.

Jesus said the man or woman who has much forgiven will love much. Many people think He meant by this that one had to sin deeply in order to love much. He surely did not mean that. He simply meant the one who repented most deeply would love most. We know this is true. The lovingest hearts are always the ones who have sorrowed deeply over their wrongs, whether great or small. No matter how light a sin is it looks big to the truly penitent heart.

It is an appalling truth, but great wickedness seems at times to carry men beyond the bounds of repentance. The most marked difference between a good man and a wicked one is the ability to repent. A good man will break his heart over the smallest wrong to his neighbor, even when it is unintentional. But a wicked man will justify himself for the most heinous crime. Some years ago a man who had committed a dozen brutal cowardly murders, many of them innocent and helpless people, when he was caught and sentenced to die, exclaimed, "This is what I get for being a man and defending myself."

This story is told of Dr. Samuel Johnson, which, to my mind, is a fine illustration of the true nobility of a penitent heart.

One day after Dr. Johnson became the great authority of English letters he was seen standing before a little

book-stall in London bareheaded in a severe storm. When they tried to get him to come in he only shook his head, while the salty tears mingled with the rain drops on his cheeks. Later he said his act was one of penitence for a great wrong he had done his father. The little book-stall had once been his father's. It was here that he earned the money to send the boy to school, and later to college. One day, after Samuel came home from school, the father was not feeling well, and asked his boy to keep the book-stall for him that day. But the young man was afraid he would be seen at such lowly labor by some of his rich companions from Oxford and refused to go. Later the thought of this wrong broke his heart. He was one who said, I will not, but afterwards he repented and went.