

Come On In!

‡ True obedience (vv.28-31a)

‡ Righteous by faith (vv.31b-32)

In the name of Jesus the Commander of the Lord's Armies, the Word of God in the flesh:

No one is sure where the picture came from, but Google "Uncle Sam," and that grizzled guy under the top hat is pointing: *I Want You*.... It goes way back, personifying the government calling for military service, except for rejects – *too young, too old, too small, too tall, too blind or deaf to hear the call.*

Now picture the kindest face you've ever seen, smiling in love like you've never known, reaching with hands still scarred from the nails that could never hold Him to the cross as only God's love could do. This is recruitment too. To call you out of the crunching cold of human hatred, away from the blazing wrath of God's judgment to come, into the warmth of Gods grace. **Come On In!** to...

‡ True obedience (vv.28-31a)

The criteria for this recruitment are so upside down and convoluted that most human beings turn away in disgust. But the real shock comes when you see who accepts this gracious invitation from God.

Jesus asked: *"What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go (ὄπαγε – quietly, w/o notice) work today in my vineyard.' He answered, 'I will not,' but later he changed his mind and went. He came to the second and said the same thing. The second son answered, 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to him, "The first."*¹

Who is Jesus asking, *"What do you think?"* This is meant to help religious skeptics like me stop and think; nobody could make this up. For three years Jesus of Nazareth has been performing miracles that prove He is the Son of God. Along with raising the dead, and giving hearing to the deaf, now Jesus is in the temple healing the blind and lame. Enemies deny He's God, yet Jesus is reading their minds and hearts, telling them what they're thinking. Jesus does not need to ask, *"What do you think?"* He already knows. *"Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O LORD."* (Psalm 139:4 NIV84)

Jesus wants each of us to admit what we're thinking, first to ourselves, then to God. For nearly three years Jesus' enemies had been plotting to kill Him. Now they want Jesus dead because everyone knew He had raised His friend Lazarus after four days in the grave! (John 11:1-53) *"But not during the Festival, or the people may riot."* (Mark 14:2 TPA) God had other plans. 1500 years of Jewish Passovers foreshadowed until John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Testament, pointed at Jesus: *"Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29) Jesus would die during that very Passover Festival, and the Palm Sunday crowds who cheered, *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"* would not even defend Him. Nor would His disciples.

Jesus alone lived **True obedience** – even to death on the cross for His heavenly Father's will to save us. So He tells this parable of the *Two Sons* to His enemies, trying to recruit them for the kingdom of God. Anyone can get the concept. The second son sounded good, then bailed. The first son refused recruitment, but then obeyed their father anyway. Since Jesus commands His followers to announce the Good News of forgiveness to the whole wide world (Mark 16:15), how many people did you tell about Jesus this week? Fact: The only Son who ever said, "Okay," and went right away is Jesus.

¹ Scriptures from the EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022.

✠ Righteous by faith (vv.31b-32)

Apparently, we're all in trouble with God. So why would He recruit any of us? Not one of us loves God perfectly with all our heart and soul and mind. Not one of us loves our neighbor as ourself. Even if you could keep the first seven Commandments – which you can't, but theoretically, if you could, you'd still trip up on the Eighth Commandment every time you thought bad things about someone or even listened to someone gossiping about others, including politicians, whether you're a journalist or just a voter. When someone asked Abraham Lincoln, "Is God on the side of the North or the South," the wise Christian President answered, "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."² How do we get on God's side when every sin blocks us?

Listen to Jesus. He is the truth, and truth is all He says. Speaking to His enemies, Jesus shows the self-righteous are like the second son who said he'd go, then didn't. But here's a shocking news flash. Who are the ones like the first son who said, "No," then went anyway? ***Jesus said to them, "Amen I tell you: The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, but you did not believe him. However, the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him. Even when you saw this, you did not change your mind and believe him."***

Look who feels the need for Jesus. Greedy, lying, cheating ***tax collectors***. Men and women ***prostitutes*** who sell their bodies for money. At first they say, "No!" to God, then change their minds and ***believe*** in John's message about Jesus. One word summarized John's message, the same word was echoed by Jesus: "***Repent!***" Both added, "***Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near!***" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17) Jesus explains where God rules: "***The kingdom of God is within you.***" Faith believes God.

How many people have said or at least thought, "Pastor, I wish I could believe." God's answer? ***Come On In!*** God says even the desire to believe is given by God. As Jesus says through His Apostle Paul: "***Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.***" (Philippians 2:12f NIV84) When you feel your faith is weak, tell Jesus. Be like the father who asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son: "***If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.***" "***If you can?***" ***Jesus said to him. "All things are possible for the one who believes."*** ***The child's father immediately cried out...with tears, "I do believe. Help me with my unbelief!"*** (Mark 9:22–24) Jesus healed his son. Jesus will heal your heart too.

Growing in faith takes time. Be patient with yourself. Keep responding when Jesus says, ***Come On In!*** Accept your place with fellow sinners, knowing that you have ***True obedience***, baptized into the name of Jesus who lived perfectly in your place and mine. You are ***Righteous by faith*** in God's declaration for the world. In time we learn to rest all our weight on Jesus and our burdens too.

If you've heard this all your life in a Christian family, it's easy to get droopy eyed in sermons like this. We need God's help, and sometimes it hurts. One pastor friend told about a tornado in their tiny town and no time to prepare his sermon. Later the people said, "It was your best ever! You spoke from the heart." I told him, "They were also listening from the heart, feeling their need for God's grace."

Life can be like a frozen river, but remember the man crawling on his stomach as the ice is shifting and creaking all around. He keeps crawling until he hears a heavy loaded sleigh pulled by a team of horses coming across behind him. Aren't you a little sheepish as the driver waves on by? Get up. Go to work. Stand strong in the Lord. Help others like the man on a bus growing more tired by the minute. A woman is so anxious, clutching her bags to keep them from falling. "Lady, if you just put your bundles on the floor, the bus can carry you and them." ***Come On In!*** with all your baggage, fellow sinners. Jesus can carry you and me. Jesus alone can relieve us of our burdens, our worry and guilt. Jesus is the ultimate obedient Son, your Lord, your Savior, your Friend – recruiting you. And there are no rejects. Amen.

² https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/abraham_lincoln_388944