

St. Margaret's Uniting Church

Mooroolbark

Sunday, 1st October, 2017

Reflection by Liam – a member of our congregation from Burma, now preparing for training as an Ordained Minister of the Word.

Reading from New Testament –

Matthew 21:23-32 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. 30 The father[a] went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

The parables of the two brothers

Intro:

To understand the message better, I 'd like to introduce the short background of Gospel of Mathew.

1. The writer! Who was Mathew?

- One of the 12 disciples of Jesus, Levi, a son of Alpheus
- Jesus himself called him to follow while serving in the office
- He is a publican, a government official under the Roman Empire
- Educated, literate, lived a comfortable life but left his position, and follow Jesus
- He was despised by the Jews because of political reason and since Tax collectors were seen as Roman's supporter and corrupted
- First, he works among the Jewish community later as a missionary to foreign and tradition said that he died as Martyr in Ethiopia

2. The purpose of Mathew Gospel

- To the Jewish audience (Diaspora) that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Messiah, whom God had promised since the beginning
- To prove that Jesus is the King, the promised one, he traced the genealogy of Jesus from the beginning of his gospel
- Since, Jesus is the King, he emphasizes on the Kingdom of God
- The Jewish community expects that the Messiah will come and overthrow the Roman Empire and establish the Worldly Kingdom
- But Mathew said that, Jesus come to establish 'the kingdom of God' but that is to rule the heart of man
- He proves 'the Kingdom of God' in many different ways using 'parables'

In our text today: Mathew is telling us a story when Jesus was questioned about his authority by the Jewish leaders that whether he is from God or someone else, as they usually try to trap Jesus. Then, Jesus (Counter question) asked them back a question whether John' was from God or from man? When they could not give an answer, then. Jesus gave this parables about the two brothers.

The intention of Jesus is not to embarrass them but to see themselves who they are before God and then come to God and accept his gift of eternal life.

The two brothers: The one said Yes but did not go and work. The other one said 'No' after a while, changed his mind and went back to work.

The 1st Application is:

'The context in which Jesus is speaking to 'the Jewish' people. He is pointing out that God has a mission for the Jewish nation. They had to obey and works in God's vineyard. For the Jewish, it looks like they obey God and works for Him but they are not.

Let's see 'Abraham'. God choses him and said in Gen. 12:3 '... in you all the family of the earth shall be blessed'. Abraham and all his descendant should never forget that 'through them, all the family of the earth will be blessed. The heathen should come to know the living God as they work for God. But they are not—all their life is full of revenge, in fact, the more they got blessed, the more they should humble and bear a better testimony for God. This principle never changed all through the history.

Not as a political reason, let us see the Israel today! I got an Israel friend whom I discuss to him about the middle East peace process that If the Israel/Jewish nation keep the promise of God and be a messenger, there will be peace in the middle east. The Jewish are to show the love of God to the neighbouring countries. It's contrary today.

Even in the day of Jesus, with their arrogance, they thought that being the children of Abraham by flesh, they will enter into the Kingdom of God, Jesus replied them that they will not. 'Only who has faith in God will. They knew God but they are not willing to work for Him. They are not willing to change their heart for God.

The 2nd Application is:

A person saying 'no' later he changed his mind and do it - apply to people in the beginning unwilling later they saw 'the light of the gospel' and obeyed and went on to do God's will and work for Him. Example. – Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, Apostle Paul.

Paul, Saul of Tarsus, as he persecutes the Church, on his way to Damascus, he met Jesus, changed his life and works for the Lord then.

God gives a space and time to change our heart. The one that changed life is, of course the Spirit of the Lord, but unless we consent the Spirit or willing to submit to His will, He cannot change us. In theological term we

call it 'repentance'. Being remorseful for what we did in the past is not repentance. Repentance is 'we recognize our need of help and turn to God or submit to God then, the Spirit of God works in us and turn our way 180 degree.'

In the book of Exodus we heard the story of Children of Israel. I wonder why are they called 'Children all through their history?' If someone is called a child' all his entire life, I am sure there should be something wrong. They were called 'children of Israel'. Which mean they are not growing. Unwilling to change their heart. They did not let the spirit of God works in them.

In the book of Philippians, 2, we see the great humility of Jesus, He is God and is in the form of God but Bible said he emptied himself. In Greek, the word 'Ekenosen' is used. The meaning is that 'self-emptying of one owns will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will'. It's not being 'giving up' His divine attributes. What Jesus did is that in order to save us, he took the form of man and came into this world and sacrifice himself for us.

Conclusion:

The gospel of Mathew taught us that Christ came to rule in the heart of man and establish His Kingdom. The parables of the two brothers taught us who we ought to be. As an individual, as a Church, as a nation, we are responsible to work for the vineyards of the Lord.

Phil 2 is 'Love one another' in other word. Showing our love to someone else, caring one another. One of the great lesson I have learnt here is how you treat each other as a couple. Some of them are together for 50 years. Jesus said to His disciples 'Love one another so that people will know you are my disciples.

Story of Rev. Hla Myint- being a Buddhist and lecturer at University of Yangon. He went to the Christian funeral and burial. He sees that the bereaved family had some kind of hope, joy even in the midst of shedding of tears. He said that 'I would like to have this experience too'. Then, they share the Gospel of Jesus and become a Christian. Now, he is serving as one of the leading Pastor in Burma.

Do you belong to the first brother or the second? Working in the vineyard of the Lord. You don't need to be a preacher to serve God but you need to have a changed heart, a willing heart to heart the Lord. Showing our

Love to each other is a sign already as a disciple. May God bless each one of us to be whom He wants us to be.