

Matthew 21:23-32 – “Have You Changed Your Mind?”
1) About the authority in your life? 2) About Repentance?
(Seminarian Jonny Lehmann)

What does it take for you to change your mind? You and I live in a world that operates like a revolving door. One second, you believe one thing, the next second that very thing has been deemed outdated or even “misinformation.” All it takes is a quick scroll down your Facebook feed, or a finger press on your TV remote, to see this repetitive dance. When new information confronts you that challenges your previous conviction, what’s your first reaction? What is your baseline test for authenticity? I’m guessing you’re not the kind of person who if they read online that the Earth’s gravity was going to go out tomorrow, would instantly run to the nearest quarry and purchase a small boulder to keep from floating into space. So what is it that solidifies the truth for you? It’s all a matter of authority, isn’t it? Maybe you’re looking to make a change to your diet, and you read an article on the benefits of kale from a self-help guru, it can be pretty easy to disregard it and type in another Google search. Now, if you ask your best friend for diet advice and they tell you all about how kale has been the difference-maker for them, I’m guessing you might consider it a whole lot more. Why? Because you trust the source. We live at a scene in history when trust in authority is at an all-time low. We live at a time when trust in God’s authority may be even lower. Have you changed your mind about Jesus’ authority in your life?

Judging by your faces, you look surprised by that question! “Of course Jesus is the authority in my life, there is no changing my mind on that!” But on a subconscious level, maybe you and I haven’t realized the subtle but dangerous change of mind that tempts us. On the surface, you and I say “Let go and let God” or “God is good all the time!” but inwardly our personal authority begins to color our life perspective. We look and say the part, but inside we march by a different drum. Maybe as we stand in the temple courts on the Tuesday of Holy Week with Jesus today, you look beside you and see the social group you are standing with. You don’t see the disciples, you don’t see the people surrounding Jesus with eager hearts to listen. You see them: the Jewish leaders, that group that just could not tolerate a spiritual authority above themselves. They approach Jesus with forceful steps, livid from the day before when Jesus overturned their authority with each overturning of a money-changer’s table. Can you hear the bite in their questions? “By what authority are you

doing these things?” “And who gave you this authority?”

If you’re thinking you would never ask such questions to Jesus, you might need to change your mind. How many times do you and I play the part of the obedient child of God, but inwardly there is a subconscious debate in our hearts, wondering if God really is in control. We say the right words. But inside, we question our God and his supremacy as we see raging forest fires, skyrocketing COVID numbers, political chaos, family relationships strained. Satan longs for us to keep our mind set on me, myself, and I, as the “authority” that dictates our lives. Do you see the tragedy of such a satanic strategy? If our education for life centers on giving God exams and tests to prove his authority, our mind and heart changes to the false notion that we can make it through life entirely on our own, an obedience to self.

There you are, standing with the Jewish leaders, angry that your authority has been challenged and proven ineffective. After such a biting question, you’d expect Jesus to be taken aback or respond angrily in return. How does Jesus respond to this attempt to erode his authority? With a question of his own: “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism - where did it come? Was it from heaven or, of human origin?” Jesus, the Master-Teacher, looks at some unruly spiritual students, and looks past the surface issues of hurt and emotions and cuts to the core. He could’ve written them off, given them the silent treatment, or given in to their demands. Instead, he looks to teach them, questioning the authority they take so much pride in so their minds and hearts can be changed. His lesson? His authority came from the same source as John’s: The Lord himself.

You and I, often following the same wayward thought process as these Jewish leaders, see Jesus looking straight into our eyes too. When we question and complain about God’s authority in our lives, he doesn’t write us off, he doesn’t give us the silent treatment, through the Scriptures he cuts to the core. He asks the right questions. He keeps approaching us and he leads us to the life-changing truth that he is the almighty. He changes your mind about authority! This is what Christian education means to do on every level: to ask the right questions, to lead young people and old alike to his life-changing truths. The Master Teacher sits you

down, he answers you as you question his control over this universe, he approaches you again and again when the authority in life is nothing but confusion, chaos, and craziness and teaches you to forget about your lack of authority and his complete authority. Talk about an authority worth obeying! Have you changed your mind about authority? If you have, do you know what follows?

When the Word changes your mind about the only real authority worth your absolute obedience, it directs your mind and heart toward a total life turnaround...repentance. Now you feel ready to disassociate yourself from those Jewish leaders, leaving them in your shadow as you sit at Jesus' feet, but just as you are ready to take that first step, you look closer at the faces in the crowd. You see him, your local tax collector who you know has been cheating you out of money for years. You see her, that woman who's known for having sex for money. Maybe changing my mind about Jesus isn't the right life choice to make! Look at the people Jesus inspires; do I really want to be like one of them?

As this question sprints through your mind, Jesus seamlessly answers it without you saying a word. "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 'Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.'" The first son is almost breathless in his response, "I WILL NOT!" He flat out refuses without even a hint of an excuse. How different than the second son whose voice is dripping with politeness to his dad. But notice the different results: The first son changes his mind and does what his father asked. The second son shows his words are meaningless and his mind unwilling to change. Then, it hits you. "How often I've been the second son in my faith life. I say the right things, I show up to worship, I wear my cross necklace, I put a tattoo of a Bible verse on my arm, I confess Christ with my mouth but I deny him with my actions! I flat out refuse to listen to Jesus' teaching and choose to educate myself with the decaying education of self that majors in the "comparison game" theory and minors in the field of "repentance make-believe." As you contemplate Jesus' words, you look at his face, and all of the sudden you find yourself moving closer to him. He knows me, every part of me.

As you approach, he gives you the meaning to the story, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John

came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did." Have you changed your mind about repentance? Notice Jesus doesn't say the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom without you, but rather ahead of you. As crazy as it sounds, you want to follow these outcasts and join their ranks! How can this be? Because they put their sins behind them, they looked ahead to Jesus, and they changed their ways. They changed their minds about true authority, and it led them to a total change of mind in both their life and their connection to God. That's the very meaning of repentance! Their Rabbi, their teacher, taught them the uselessness of superficial obedience. He taught them the joy of obeying the Lord who not only taught the path of life, but paved it, walked it, and died for it so we could join him on this eternal glorious journey!

Do you have any hesitations about leaving the Jewish leaders? NO! Now, you sit among Jesus' students and have no reservations in the least! Your Christian education is just beginning! Being a Christian isn't going through the motions, it's living real, true, genuine life. Repentance is more than tears of regret, it's a lifestyle change, a mind-change. Now, you willingly confess your sins to God and to your fellow students of Christ. You confess your faults, knowing that Jesus wrote the book on forgiveness and offers it freely. There is no tuition cost! Not only that, but you listen to his instruction through his Word, and it changes everything. That's what Christian education is all about! Christian education isn't just a process to teach young people how to win Bible trivia contests or make sure they find a WELS spouse. It means to lead to repentance and faith every day. It's living this life under the shadow of the cross and marveling at the radiance of the empty tomb. It's hearing the Master-Teacher, learning his love and holding nothing back in showing it. A joyful obedience to the only perfect authority.

Will you ever stop sitting at the feet of the Son not mentioned in the parable? The Son who said "yes" to his Father, and finished the work he was asked to do? The Son of God who never did the superficial but accomplished the sacrificial? The Son who teaches you, and his instruction is simple: Repent and believe! Have you changed your mind?