

BELPRES  CHURCH

Sermon Title: Lord of All

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Scripture:

Matthew 21: 28-32

²⁸ "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.'

²⁹ "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

³¹ "Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² 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. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Transcript:

Well, hello. Good to see all of you. Thank you for joining us and hello to those of you who are joining us online. Happy Palm Sunday to everyone here and online. The scripture this morning comes from Matthew 21:28. Jesus is talking. He says, "What do you think? There's 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. Which of the two did what his father wanted? 'The first,' they answered." Jesus said to them, "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 prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

So, Holy Spirit, use this to time to help us understand the scripture and follow you more because of it. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen. Well, when my son was little, he would sometimes just refuse to eat. He doesn't do that now. He's 20 and now he eats a lot. But as a little guy, he sometimes would just wouldn't eat. And when he didn't eat, it made him very grouchy and very angry, which became a problem for the rest of us. And we would say, "If you would just eat something, you'd feel better." Or sometimes, he'd be at a swim meet because he was a swimmer and he wasn't doing as well as he wanted to do at the meet. And we'd say, "If you ate, if you would just eat, you would have more energy." And what do you think happened every time we told him to eat? Yeah, that pretty much guaranteed that he was not going to eat at all. Like he would just get kind of stubborn about it and wouldn't eat, which became a problem for all of us.

And there were so many times where I'd be like, "If you would just do what I'd tell you to do, everything would be so much better." And I'd think, "I wonder if that's what God thinks about me." Right? Like, "Dudley, if you would just do what I told you to do, everything would be so much better if you would just obey." This is the last sermon in a series on how going to church is good, but Jesus calls us to more and He offers more, and He calls us to be disciples. And we said, "Disciples are six things. They're marked by Jesus' love, they live connected to a multicultural money, multigenerational community, they're eager and equipped to share the good news of Jesus, they're healers of injustice who live sacrificially and obey Jesus as Lord through prayer and scripture." Guess which one we're doing today? Obey, obey. And that's a hard word to swallow, isn't it?

We don't like that word. Our culture doesn't like that word, obey. It runs counter to our culture where we say, "No, I don't obey anyone. I am my own authority. I decide what is good for me." But that is so naive because we are all following some kind of authority. Maybe it's the culture, or other people's opinions of us, or desire for money, or success, or popularity, or politics. Whatever it is, it drives us and it makes us fearful of losing those things. The question is not whether or not I'm going to obey a lord, we're all obeying some lord. Question is which one and where's it taking us? Because Jesus does not call us to a slavish obedience, He offers a joyful obedience that leads to health, and wholeness, and life, and vitality. Even people who are not Christians will agree that if everyone just did what Jesus told us to do, if everyone did just what Jesus said to do, the world would be a better place. Most non-Christians would agree with that.

If we loved our spouses the way the Bible says to, our marriages would be better. If we gave generously the way the Bible says to, that would actually free us more from money worries. If we did what Jesus said, there'd be no wars, no racism, no poverty. Jesus' commands are not meant to keep us from having fun, they're meant to help us live an abundant life. And He made us so he knows best what is going to help us thrive. And that's what the story I just read is about. Now, the context for this story is just a few verses before it's Palm Sunday. And that's what we celebrate today, where Jesus goes into Jerusalem on a donkey and the whole crowds are singing, "Yay." They're waving palm branches just shouting. "Hosanna. Yay, Jesus, go Jesus. We're team Jesus." But then, just five short days later, they are no longer shouting "Hosanna". They're shouting, "Crucify Him," because He didn't do what they wanted Him to do. Jesus didn't obey them.

You see, they thought Jesus was coming as a military general to kick out the Romans who were oppressing them, but He didn't do that. So instead, they crucified Him because He didn't do what they wanted Him to do. But here's the thing, the Creator of the universe is not someone you invite into your life as your personal assistant to help you get everything that you want. Jesus is Lord. He is Lord of our money, Lord of our time, Lord of our attitude, Lord of our internet browser, Lord of our relationships. We can't say, "Jesus, You can be Lord of my Sundays, You can be Lord of my prayer life, but You can't be Lord of my money, or my relationships, or my sex life. You can't be Lord over here." If He's not Lord of all, then He's not Lord at all. And we can't reserve little places over here, "You're not Lord here." And that's what we see in this story where the father asked his sons to work in the vineyard.

And the first son said, "I will not." Okay, in this culture, that's about the worst thing the son could do. He doesn't even say it politely. It's just this rude, flat out, "I will not." In that culture, the father would've been expected to beat him with a club for this. But the text says, "Later, he changed his mind and he went. Then, the father went to the other son and said the same thing.

He answered, "I will, sir." Sir, how nice, how polite, what a good boy, right? Parents would say to their daughters, "Why can't you date the second son? Look how polite he is to his father. What a good boy he is not like these losers you bring home. Date the second son." But then the text says he did not go. And then, Jesus asked the religious leaders who He's telling this story to, "Which of the two did what the father wanted?" "The first," they answered. And then, Jesus just lets them have it.

He says, "Truly, I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John," that's John the Baptist, "came to you to show you the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him." He's saying this to religious people, people who go to church and saying "Hosanna," but they're not disciples because they don't do, they don't obey Jesus, like the second son said yes but didn't obey. And the people who seemingly say no to Jesus, when they encounter the real Jesus, they obey Him the most like the first son. And the reason the tax collectors and the sinners are getting in ahead of the religious people is that they know they need forgiveness for their sins. They are under no illusion that they are good people.

They know they need a savior to forgive them from their sins, unlike religious people who sometimes think of themselves as good. And what Jesus said here would've infuriated them because tax collectors were other Jews that collaborated with the Romans and oppressing their fellow Jews and prostitutes were considered highly immoral. I mean, it would be as if I invited Jesus to be the guest preacher here one Sunday. You'd all come right? If it's Jesus as a guest preacher, you'd all show up. And it'd be as if Jesus then said, looked at us and said, "Drug dealers and scam artists are going to heaven ahead of you, bell pressers." I would get emails, "Pastor Dudley, I did not like the guest preacher named Jesus. He did not make me feel comfortable. Do not have Him back." Jesus did not do what the religious people and the political people wanted Him to do.

He didn't confirm their biases, He didn't uphold their traditions, He didn't kick out the Romans, so the religious folk combined with the political folk crucified Him. In fact, it's really clear in the New Testament, the more religious you were and the more political you were, the more you didn't like Jesus. They weren't willing to obey Jesus as Lord. But as I said earlier, if everyone just did what Jesus commanded us to do, the world would be a better place. And our lives would be harder, truth in advertising, it's harder to obey Jesus, but they'd also be more fulfilling and deeper. Years ago, before I was a pastor, I was teaching at the time, I volunteered to lead a by Bible study of college guys in my church. And at one point, to thank me, they bought a Bible for me and they had my name engraved on the front of it. It was very thoughtful.

But after a few weeks, somehow, I don't know how, I lost it. And I felt terrible about losing it. Right? I felt really badly. And I am embarrassed to tell you what I did. Yesterday I was like, "Am I really going to tell this story? I'm going to tell this story to illustrate a point." But it's very embarrassing, I hope I don't get fired. Instead of just telling my Bible study guys, "I lost the Bible you gave me," oh no, no, no. I went and bought another Bible that looked just like that Bible and I had it engraved. Now, my reasoning was, I didn't want them to think I didn't care about them because I lost their Bible. Do you think that was my real reason? No, it was my image. I didn't want them to think badly of me. Now, I should say I don't usually lie, it's not a habit of mine, but in this case I did lie.

So, I showed up the next week with my new Bible and one of the guys goes, "Is that the Bible we gave you? Because it looks different. The name is in a different place." Do you know what I did? I doubled down. I said, "Oh no, you're not remembering it right. No, no, this is the one you gave me." Which is stupid because in that moment, I went from Scott the Bible loser to Scott the liar, which is worse. For the next week, the Holy Spirit just hammered at me, would not let just everything, just constantly, "You got to tell the truth. You got to tell them the truth. You got to," and I didn't want to tell them that. I was their mentor, I didn't want to tell them the truth. But finally, I obeyed. And I went the next week and I said, "I'm so embarrassed, but I lied. Here's what happened. I am so sorry." And they were great. They forgave me.

It actually strengthened our relationships because I gave them an example of how to screw up in epic form and then have to ask forgiveness and repentance and all of that. And my willingness to be honest made them feel like they could be more honest with their sins and failures. And it also reminded me why lying is a really bad idea. Now, it would've been better if I just obeyed God in the first place and not lied, but having screwed up, I obeyed God and repented, and the result was better relationships. I felt forgiven and free, clean conscience, and was reminded not to lie. It was hard, but obedience led to something deeper. Now, that's just a little thing, but how we do little things is how we do everything. And it's the day-to-day acts of obedience, the little acts of obedience that add up to our character, just like drops of rain add up to be an ocean.

And the way we know what Jesus is commanding us to do is, I've said this many times so I'll just mention it, the Bible, scripture will comfort you, scripture will encourage you, but scripture will also challenge you, and critique you, and call you to something higher. Let it. And the other way we know what God commands us to do is through prayer. Now, you got to check what you hear in prayer against scripture because God's never going to ask us to do something that's not in the Bible. Check with other people. But God tells us what to do in prayer, kind of like He did for me. The Holy Spirit just kept saying, "You got to tell the truth, Scott. You got to tell the truth." Disciples obeyed Jesus through prayer and scripture. So then the question is, how do we get

better at obeying? Because all of us, including me as I just demonstrated, disobey God. So, how do we get better at obeying Jesus?

Well, let me tell you what it is not. It is not just by trying harder, it is not just through sheer force of will. A couple years ago, I took my oldest daughter, Holly, to Paris on a father-daughter trip and she was determined to try escargot. That's snails, okay? But if you've actually had it, it's just mostly butter and garlic and a tiny bit of snail. But they come in a shell, and she has a huge aversion to slugs and snails. When she was looking for a college to go to, she refused to go to Whitworth in Spokane because she saw a slug when she visited. Okay. I am on the board of trustees at Whitworth. It is a wonderful school. She wouldn't go because she saw a slug on campus. So, where did she go to school instead? University of Washington, like slug central, right? Like the slug should be their mascot, not the husky.

But in Paris, she was determined to try escargot cause it's French and she wanted the experience. But when the plate was in front of her, she started to hyperventilate and whimper. I kid you not. Right? And I said, "Don't eat it. I'll eat it. I love escargot." "No, I'm in France, I've got to try." And she'd bring the fork to her mouth but then she'd start panting and whimpering. Right? People were looking at us, right? [foreign language 00:14:02]. Right? Finally, after much drama, she managed to take one tiny little bite. Okay, that's not how we obey Jesus, through sheer willpower and forcing our ourselves. That's not how we do it. It comes to one word, trust. Do you trust Jesus? Do you trust that He loves you more than you can imagine? Which means, His commands are not meant to constrain you, but to help you thrive.

Do you trust that He loves you and so what He asks you to do is for your own good? So then the question becomes, "How do I learn to trust Jesus more?" Because when we trust, it's more natural to obey. Well, first way we learn to trust Jesus is look at Jesus before you look at the command. Right? We love to look at the command, "Oh, I don't want to do that, that sounds terrible." Look at Jesus first, all that He's done for you, died to pay the price for our sins that we know deep down inside needs to be paid or there's no justice, in view of God's mercies as we talked about last week. You can trust Him. And it goes back to that first characteristic of a disciple, marked by Jesus' love. Jesus is not asking you to obey because He's demanding God to keep you from having fun. It's because He loves you and He wants a relationship with you, and He was willing to get hurt Himself to have it.

Jesus would rather die than lose you so He did. Look at Him, be marked by His love. That builds trust. And when we trust that He's for us, we obey Him. Second way to trust Jesus is to look at your other lords and how harshly they rule. Because we all are obeying various lords. Question is which ones? If what's lord of your life is lust, that leads to sexual addiction and then lead you to treat others as objects of desire, which erodes relationship. If what's lord of your life is what other people think of you, then you're going to constantly doing things you don't want to do just

to earn their approval. Those other lords rule harshly. Look at them and how different they are than Jesus. Third way to grow in trust so that we obey is to well, obey. And I know that sounds like a circular argument, we learn to obey by obeying, but it's true.

When you obey, you start to realize, "Oh, this actually is better for me." Like my son, if he just would eat, "Oh, actually, I do feel better." When you obey, you realize, "Oh, this is better," and that builds trust to obey the next time. Now, sometimes, it can take years to see the fruit of obedience, years, but it always, always comes. After my parents died and my siblings and I were sort of settling their estate, we noticed that they'd made no provision in their will to give 10% of their estate to their church, which was odd because they were committed tiders. Tide means to just give 10% of what you earn to the faith community you are part of to be used for God's purposes. It's a command, not a suggestion. But my parents didn't write that into their will. But for my siblings and me, that was a no-brainer.

We gave 10% of what we each inherited to my parents' church, their money so their church. Well, it took me a couple of months to get around to calling my parents' financial advisors to have him send the 10% from my portion of the estate to my parents' church, and in the intervening months, the market had gone up. So, when I finally told him, "Send the 10%," he said, "10% of what it's worth now or 10% of what it's worth when you got it?" Because that would be less. Now, that could be one of those moments, right, where you go, "Well, let me see." But for me, no-brainer, it's a command. I obeyed 10% of what it's worth today. And then, I got an email from my parents' pastor and he said, "Where would you like the money to go?" Because they didn't really have a way to receive estates. And I just need to say parenthetically, by the way, we do. It's called the Legacy Foundation.

You can leave the church in your will as my wife and I have done, and that money goes for a lot of good purposes. But they didn't really have a way to receive estates. So, I said, "Apply it to your church's greatest financial need." And he said, "Oh, it's not very exciting. Our furnace died and we don't have the money to fix it." And I said, "It would give me an unnatural joy to fix your furnace." It made me freakishly happy to fix their furnace with that money. You know why? Because as a pastor, sometimes, people will say to me, "I don't want to give to overhead. I want to give to things I care about." Okay, overhead is the staff and the facility, right? And nobody wants to give money to fix a furnace, but you kind of want a furnace when it's January. I obeyed and it literally, it made me freakishly happy because I realize I saved that pastor, pastor to pastor, some sleepless nights.

But also, I want you to notice something else in this story. Three siblings agreeing on giving up money, giving it away. How often do you think that happens between siblings when settling estates? Not very often. But in my family, no drama, no mess because we obeyed Jesus. There's

a deep joy in obedience, not the shallow waters of happiness, but depths of joy in obedience. And the more we obey, the more we trust and the more we obey. Which brings me to my last point, in order to trust Jesus to obey, want the more that He offers. Jesus calls us to a bigger life than just me, and mine, and getting everything that I want. He's calling us to heal what is wounded, mend what has been broken, restore what has been lost. But in order to do all of that, we have to obey Him.

So, here's our action steps for this week. First, focus on Jesus' love this week. Prayer, scripture, remind yourself of His love. A great way to do that would be to come on Good Friday, to our services where we'll walk through His death and just use that as a time to reflect and say over and over, "He did this for me. He did this for me. He did this for me." And then, come Easter and celebrate the resurrection. And then second, ask Jesus, "Where do you want me to obey You? Show me." And maybe, the place to start is that little area over here that you said, "You're not Lord here, Lord." There's a woman I know named Sue who had a house she just loved, just loved her house, it fit her perfectly. But she started to get a nudge from God to move out. And she fought it for a really long time because she really liked her house.

But it wouldn't go away. So, finally, she obeyed. She stepped out in faith, moved to a cheaper condo and rented her house for a while. Still not quite sure why or what it was about. Then later, she got a job at a hospital, answering calls from patients who were waiting to receive an organ transplant, and these calls came from all over the world. When they finally arrived, they were scared, they were nervous, they often didn't have money to stay in a hotel, and that's when Sue knew what she was supposed to do with her house. So, even though she doesn't have a lot of money, she now lets patients who need it stay in her house for free. What's more, she's living as cheaply as she can to save up enough money to buy another condo to make that available as well. And whenever she talks about it, her face just kind of lights up and she starts talking faster. She describes herself as "rip-roaring enthusiastic." That how she just, she says, "I'm addicted to this. Because it just feels so good to be used by God to give people in enormous pain and fear some rest, and some hope, and some healing in Jesus' name. And I'm making lifelong friends with these people." Her obedience is costly. She had to move out of her house to obey. But the God of the universe personally invited her to be part of His rescue operation and that is giving her joy. So, what's your step of obedience this week? Maybe it's to reconcile with someone, maybe it's like me to go back and tell someone you lied to, go back and tell them the truth, maybe it's to stop gossiping about someone or about something. Whatever it is, obedience leads to a bigger life.

It can take a while to realize it, but it leads to a bigger life. Because if we aren't willing to sacrifice to obey Jesus, if it's all about having everything my way where I work, or where I go to school, or in my family, or in my church, we will live cramped, tiny lives. We will not see

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ourselves, our friendships, our families, our marriages transformed. Death by suburb, not so me, not so you, not so this church. As the Bible says, "Choose this day who you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." So, Holy Spirit, help us to obey. Lord, we don't like that word sometimes. But help us to trust that You love us, trust that obedience leads to new life, and walk in Your way as Jesus. We ask this in your name, Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Icebreaker Question:

- What is one thing that you are thankful for this week?

Opening Question:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g. traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Where in your life do you think you are obeying Jesus as Lord?
- Where do you think you are not obeying, and what step of obedience do you think God is calling you to take?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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