

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

BALK? BASK!

Matthew 21:23-32

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Marcus Felde

23When he 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?" 24Jesus 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. 25Did 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?' 26But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." 27So 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.?"

28What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. 30The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. 31Which 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. 32For 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.

DIAGNOSIS: BALK!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Unwilling*

Some who came to listen to Jesus balked at really listening to what he was saying. What he was saying must not have sounded right, or they wouldn't have asked for his sources. Source, I mean. Something inside them was unwilling to turn. They were balky, it seems to me, because Jesus had not come to them and asked if he could come in. Instead, he had the temerity to come around and invite them to join him. They would show him! They would keep him out!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Unseeing*

Because they didn't want to, they could not see "what's going on here." They had not seen John the Baptist very well, either. Well, they had kind of seen, but they had been unwilling to admit it. (Even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and "believe him," verse 32.) And this Jesus! Who did he think he was! Did he think he was from heaven? They sure couldn't see such a connection! (How could someone from heaven say such-and-such or do such-and-such or hang around with so-and-so?) They were staring right at Jesus, they had all the evidence you could want, yet because they said "We see what you're doing!" they actually couldn't. And even if they did see it, they were certainly not going to change their minds!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Out*

Because of their stubborn refusal to see what was going on in Jesus, some people who thought they were the gatekeepers were going to find themselves standing at the door watching a lot of

others troop in. The shy will come in from the cold, while the “authorities” fume. All because they tried to read Jesus without their glasses, and could not tell that he was an invitation.

PROGNOSIS: BASK!

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *In*

God was in Jesus drawing people to Jesus, and to God. Because of Jesus we can bask in the Father’s love—not because we gave the right answer when Dad gave us a job in the vineyard (we didn’t) but because we turned around and noticed when Jesus breezed through. By what authority did he do those things? Do you even have to ask! Have some more crackers and cheese!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Twigging*

Australians call it “twigging” when you have a little epiphany, when all the dots connect. Like when you’re staring at a Magic Eye picture and all of a sudden the 3-D reality comes into focus, where there was nothing before but distortions of reality. Those who twig to Jesus are on a good vine. They glory (bask) in what is so obvious, now that you think about it—that Jesus is the One Good Son, and we are in him.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Willing*

On the vine, alive, rejoicing, we honestly can’t think of anything we’d rather do this morning than run out to the vineyard and pull some weeds, rebuild a wall, whatever you say, Father. (Sorry for the mangled metaphor, but it’s no worse than the Good Shepherd chapter in John.) We are having more fun (joy?) being a blessing than we ever had lying on the couch watching TV. By what authority do we do these things? You’re kidding, aren’t you?