

ARE YOU WILLING? **(Matthew 23:37-39)**

I heard about a little lad who was writing a letter to God at Christmas time. There was a certain Christmas present that he had his eye on, and he sought to enlist God's help in getting it. He sat down at the kitchen table and wrote, "I've been good for six months now."

He paused and reflected on what he had just written. He didn't think lying to God would strengthen his case; so, he crossed out "six months" and wrote "three." He paused once again. He crossed three months out and changed it to "two weeks."

The little boy shook his head, wadded up the piece of paper. He walked over to the mantle over the fireplace in the living room on which rested a little nativity scene. As he looked over the figures of Mary and Joseph standing above the Baby Jesus, a thought struck him. He picked up the figure of Mary and stuffed it in his pocket. He got out a clean piece of paper and went back to writing his letter to God. He wrote, "Dear Jesus, if ever you want to see your mother again . . ."

What do you do when you want to see God do something on your behalf?

- Some plead.
- Some try to sway God with convincing arguments.
- Some bargain.
- Some may even threaten as if they had any power over God.

What do **you** do when you want God to come through for you? What **should** you do?

When seeking to determine the correct course of action on anything in life, we should always look to Jesus. He is our pattern; He is our model. So, what did Jesus do when He wanted something from His Father?

The last several weeks we have been looking at what Jesus said and did on Tuesday of Passion Week. Today, we are going to consider the last three verses of Matthew 23. Before we examine that passage, however, let's fast forward a couple of days to Thursday evening of Passion Week. Jesus has already observed with His disciples what we call the Last Supper. They make their way to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus asks His disciples to pray. He goes a little farther into the garden and He pores out His soul to God. He doesn't want to have to go to the cross. He doesn't want to experience the horror, and the humiliation, and the suffering associated with crucifixion.

Look at Matthew 26:39, 42, and 44. Basically, Jesus was saying, "This is what My will is, but don't give Me My will; give Me Yours."

When we go to God in prayer, we often know exactly what we want, and we ask for what we want, and there is nothing wrong with that. But do we go on to say, "Lord, in the end, don't give me what I want; give me what You want"? Are we able to say that and actually mean it?

With that as the backdrop, let's read our text—Matthew 23:37-39. This message centers around an indictment Jesus leveled against the Jewish leaders. He said, "You

were not willing.” There is a difference between willfulness and willingness. There is a difference between wanting what we want and willingly receiving what God has ordained for us. The title of our message is simply, “Are You Willing?” I have three questions for you.

I. ARE YOU WILLING TO RECEIVE WHAT THE LORD SENDS?

Look at the first half of Matthew 23:37. In His grace and goodness, God sent various people to His people. He sent prophets. He sent John the Baptist. He sent Jesus, His own Son. Many of them were rejected, beaten, and even killed.

In Matthew 21, Jesus told a story about that very thing. He told about a land owner who had tenants working his land. When he sent some of his servants to receive his share of the produce, look at what happened in v. 35. The land owner tried again in v. 36 with the same result. Look at his last attempt and the result in vv. 37-39.

Jesus told this parable to the religious leaders. Look at their reaction in 21:45-46. They didn’t want what God wanted; they wanted what they wanted. Are we any different?

The people God sent to His people didn’t stroke their egos. They didn’t discern what they wanted and then gave them that. No. The people God sent to them gave them God’s message and did so faithfully. It wasn’t a feel-good message. It was hard message—hard to hear and hard to stomach, and the people reacted badly.

Tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two. This was not a magic tragic trick that turned out badly. He was executed by his own people. Tradition has it that Jeremiah was stoned to death. This was a good while after the king had Jeremiah thrown into a deep cistern, a pit. The king would have left him there to die, but some friends intervened and saved him.

Is there anybody in your life who tells you things about yourself that you don’t like, that you don’t want to hear? It is not likely that you are going to kill those people, but you may find yourself avoiding them.

Proverbs 27:5 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” Such friends are sent to you by God. Receive them. Listen to them. Embrace them.

In addition to sending us people, God may send us trials, situations, difficulties that are meant to shape and mold us. How do you react? Do you grumble? Do you complain? Do you throw yourself a pity party?

Last Sunday, I read to you 1 Peter 5:6 which says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you.” What God knows to be the proper time usually is much later than what we think is the proper time; so, we get impatient, and we try to fast track our growth. That never turns out well. Don’t do that. Let God do what He wants to do in His own timing because His timing is always perfect.

My mom has a recipe for pound cake, and the couple of times that I have tried to bake it myself, it never turns out like my mom’s pound cake. When I try, it is nice and golden and crisp on the outer layers, but when you slice it, it is all mushy in the middle.

Let God prepare you. He is a better cook. He knows how long to leave you in the oven. Let God grow you. He is a better farmer than you are. He knows how long to leave you in the sun.

Are you willing? Are you willing to let Him superintend your own growth? Much of that involves receiving what He sends your way.

II. ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE WHAT THE LORD SEEKS?

Look at the latter half of v. 37. We need to be careful and consider who Jesus is talking to when says “your children.” He is talking to the scribes and Pharisees. Their children would have been the Jewish people. They were tasked with the responsibility of teaching them the Scriptures and helping them learn how to live as the people of God. They should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah which the Scriptures had promised.

Jesus sought to gather the Jewish people to Himself so that He could protect them and care for them, but the religious leaders weren’t willing for that to happen. They didn’t trust Him. They didn’t believe Him. Since they saw Him as a threat, they did everything they could to separate Jesus from the people.

It was not the people who weren’t willing; it was their leaders. The NT says the people heard Him gladly. The leaders had a much different reaction. Tuesday of Passion Week was a long day. Chapters 24 and 25 contains a long teaching session of Jesus that also occurred on Tuesday. Look at how those Jesus leaders responded in Matthew 26:3-5.

They weren’t willing for Jesus to get close to the people. They weren’t even willing to let Jesus live. They wanted to kill Him, and God allowed them to succeed in their plans.

If you ever find yourself looking for a spiritual home, a place of worship and belonging, look for leaders who want you to develop your own walk with Christ. If you find a pastor or leader who wants you to commit yourself to him, run. That leader is not for you.

As your pastor, I want you to follow Jesus, not me, because I am fallible, and He is not. Follow me only insofar as I follow Christ. If you are convinced that I have departed from following Jesus, then let me know. If I don’t change, if I don’t start following Jesus, then you need to do one of two things. Either, you need to get rid of me or you need to find a church where the leadership is following Jesus.

Give the Lord what He seeks. He seeks an intimate relationship between you and Him. Don’t let anyone get in the way between you and Christ. If anyone is hindering you rather than helping you follow Christ, something needs to change. You can’t let that go on. It has to change.

This past week I read a sermon on today’s passage that was preached by David Dykes, the pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas. He recalled that in Luke 19 we find the story of Palm Sunday. Jesus made His triumphal entry in Jerusalem on the Sunday of Passion Week. We are told that as Jesus rode a donkey down the slopes of the Mount of Olives, and when He caught sight of the City of Jerusalem, He wept over it.

Pastor Dykes has made numerous trips to Israel. One of his favorite places to go is to

a beautiful church right there on the Mount of Olives. The Italian architect who designed the church made it to look like a teardrop. He said that inside the church is a beautiful mosaic in the floor. It is a picture of a hen sheltering her chicks beneath her wings. He said, “This is the only picture I’ve ever seen that portrays a chicken with a halo, but the halo is there to represent the deity of Jesus.”

As a teenager, my beautiful wife was a Beach Bunny who lived in Huntington Beach, California. Just about every day, she would ride her bike to the beach. Years later, this Beach Bunny became the chicken lady from Waukomis. For years she raised chickens. She has told me stories of how when the chicks were still little, their mother hen would gather them up under her wings.

One evening as it was getting dark, all the other hens were safely in their hen house, but a new mother hen was still in the yard far from the safety of the hen house. Ruth Ann could tell that her brood of chicks were nestled in her wings. Ruth Ann picked her up, and as Ruth Ann carried the hen to the hen house, the hen carried her chicks.

I read about a chicken farmer from Arkansas. He said that one day his chicken coop caught fire. He was able to extinguish the fire before it destroyed the coop, but it still did a great deal of damage. As he was searching through the rubble, he found a dead hen near her nest. Her feathers were scorched by the fire and smoke. When he lifted the hen, four chicks scurried out from underneath those wings chirping and cheeping. Had that hen chosen to do so, she could have saved herself, but she sacrificed herself to save her chicks.

That is what Jesus did for us. God, who is a consuming fire, let His wrath burn against Jesus as He hung there on the cross. The Bible says that Jesus bore our sin and became sin for us. The Father judged His Son in our stead. He died so that we could have life. He sheltered us under His wings.

The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 91:4, “He will shield you with His wings. He will shelter you with His feathers. His faithful promises are your armor and protection” (NLT).

III. ARE YOU WILLING TO DO WHAT THE LORD SAYS?

Because the religious leaders were not willing, Jesus promised that judgment was coming. Look at v. 38. When Jesus used the word *house*, He was referring to the temple. Remember that Jesus and his audience were still in one of the courtyards of the temple complex. Notice how He says, “your house.” Back in Matthew 21, Jesus cleansed the temple on the first day of Passion Week. He ran the merchants and money changers out of the Courtyard of the Gentiles where they had set up shop. He said, “My house, shall be a House of Prayer” (23:13).

Instead of “My house,” He says, “your house.” We read in 24:1, “Jesus left the temple,” and He never returned. Jesus has left the building. When Jesus leaves the building, judgment soon follows. Jesus could see what those religious leaders could not see. Jesus knew that 40 years hence the Roman army would surround the City of Jerusalem, and when they broke through the wall of the city, they would proceed to destroy the temple completely. In A.D. 70, their house was left desolate. It was destroyed.

Look at v. 39. Again, we have to wonder just who Jesus is talking to and about when He says “you will not see Me again.” Is He talking to and about the religious leaders? They would literally see Him again on Thursday night after He was arrested and tried. They would see Him on Friday morning when He was brought before Pilate. Some of them would see Him when He was crucified.

Personally, I think Jesus was referring to the children, to the people of Israel.

Commentators are divided on how to interpret those passages in both the OT and the NT that refer to the salvation of Israel. Does *Israel* mean the Jewish people or is the word used symbolically to refer to the Church, to the spiritual children of Abraham who are the people of faith?

Look at what Paul wrote in Romans 11:25-27. It seems to me that Jesus is taking about a national revival that will take place among the Jewish people.

In the 10th century there was a pastor/theologian named Albert Barnes. He published numerous commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments. The commentaries are called Barnes’ Notes. In his commentary that dealt with Matthew 23:39, he wrote:

This has not been yet accomplished, but the days will come when the Jews, long cast out and rejected, will hail Jesus as the Messiah, and receive Him whom their fathers killed as the merciful Savior.

What is Jesus saying? What is He telling us to do? He is telling us to call upon Him and praise Him for who He is. The One who comes in the name of the Lord is, in fact, the Lord. When we call on Him, that is when we will see Him act on our behalf.

The theme of this message has been the question, “Are you willing?” There is a difference between, “Are you able?” and, “Are you willing?” For the Christian, being able is not the issue. It never has been.

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.” That means you are able to what God calls you to do because He will empower you to do it.

The real question is, “Are you willing to do what God wants you to do?”

- Are you willing to become a person of prayer?
- Are you willing to grow in your walk with the Lord?
- Are you willing to grow in Christ-likeness?
- Are you willing to step out in faith to obey God’s call?
- Are you willing to proclaim the gospel to someone who needs to trust Christ as Savior and Lord?

It has been said, “You are as close to Christ as you choose to be.” You may think, “My will is just too weak. I can’t seem to choose to do the right thing, to actually do what I know I should do.”

If you find yourself in that situation, I have a word for you. In truth, God has a word for you. It’s in Philippians 2:13. Listen to what Paul wrote: “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Notice that will comes before work

because we will never work until we will to do so. But notice where this will to work comes from. It is God who works in us to will to do the very thing He wants us to do.

Let's close with a story from pastor and author Kyle Idleman:

When I started a new church in Los Angeles County, California, I found that I was overwhelmed with pressure and stress. I was working more than seventy hours a week. My wife would ask me to take a day off, and I would say, "I can't." I wasn't sleeping at night, and I started to take sleeping pills. When the church was about a year old, I woke up in the night, and I had this strange sense that God was laughing at me. As I lay in bed, I wondered, *Why is God laughing at me?*

It would take five years before I finally got an answer to that question. Here's how it happened: when we moved into our current house, I saved the heaviest piece of furniture for last—the desk from my office. As I was pushing and pulling the desk with all my might, my four-year-old son came over and asked if he could help. So together we started sliding it across the floor. He was pushing and grunting as we inched our way along. After a few minutes, my son stopped pushing, looked up at me, and said, "Dad, you're in my way." And then he tried to push the desk by himself. Of course, it didn't budge. Then I realized that he thought he was actually doing all the work, instead of me. I couldn't help but laugh.

The moment I started laughing at my son's comment, I recalled that middle-of-the-night incident and I realized why God was laughing at me. I thought I was pushing the desk. I know that's ridiculous, but instead of recognizing God's power and strength, I started to think it all depended on me.

Friend, it doesn't depend on you. We need to look to the Lord. Not only do we need to ask Him to help us accomplish what He wants, we also need ask Him to put within us the desire to do what He wants. That is a prayer God will answer.