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### English Standard Version

**1**The word of the LORD came to me: **2**“What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? **3**As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. **4**Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

**25**“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? **26**When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. **27**Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. **28**Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

**29**Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

**30**“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. **31**Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? **32**For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.”

## Psalm chapter 25

### English Standard Version

**1**Of David. To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. **2**O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. **3**Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. **4**Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. **5**Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. **6**Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. **7**Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! **8**Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. **9**He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. **10**All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

### Context Summary

Psalm 25:1–7 reveals David's trust in the Lord in a time of intense danger. He waits on the Lord to keep him from falling into disgrace at the hands of his foes. Parallel to this, Psalm 37:1–11 contains David's counsel about trusting the Lord and waiting on Him. He assures his readers that the Lord will destroy evildoers but reward the righteous. Psalm 40:1–5 also records the value David found in waiting on the Lord for deliverance from danger and distress.

### Psalm 25:1

#### **ESV**

Of David. To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

**What does Psalm 25:1 mean?** In this verse David looks to the Lord in prayer. Although he was surrounded by pagan nations that worshiped false gods, David addressed his prayer to the one and only true God, Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God.

The words "lift up my soul" indicate that David was turning to God with his whole being. His prayer was intense. Prayer is not required to be deeply emotional. Nor is it meant only for "important" topics. However, prayer should never be apathetic or directed to anyone other than God. Prayer should always

be focused and wholehearted. When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, His praying was focused and so intense that He fell on His face (Matthew 26:39), prayed earnestly, and "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). His disciples, on the other hand, fell asleep when they should have been praying (Matthew 26:40–41). Earlier, Jesus had told His disciples "a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

We can learn from David and Jesus what it truly means to lift our souls to the Lord in prayer.

### **Psalm 25:2**

#### **ESV**

O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.

**What does Psalm 25:2 mean?** Apparently, David is facing a perilous situation as he prays. However, he knows God is not distant, impersonal, or unapproachable. He calls him "my God." This declaration of his personal relationship with God resembles David's statement in Psalm 23:1: "The LORD is my shepherd." David knew his God was trustworthy even in life's most dangerous times.

He asks the Lord to keep him from being victimized by his enemies. David does not want his enemies to disgrace him and boast about what they had done to him. David writes that he trusts in his God. Although David was no stranger to battle, he realized that trust in the Lord is the most effective weapon to employ against an enemy. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Among the pieces of armor Scripture lists for gaining victory over the Devil is the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16).

### **Psalm 25:3**

#### **ESV**

Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

**What does Psalm 25:3 mean?** Here David expresses his confidence that the Lord will come to his assistance. He will not allow David's foes to triumph over

him and thereby disgrace him. David also includes all who hope in the Lord and await the fulfillment of His promises as being protected from disgrace by the Lord. To the contrary, the Lord will put to shame all those who treacherously oppose the righteous without provocation.

In all periods of history believers may trust the Lord to vindicate them and upset the treacherous plans of their opponents. The story of Job demonstrates this truth. The Devil schemed to destroy Job's faith by hurling all kinds of trials at him, including the ordeal of Job's wife suggesting that he curse God and die (Job 2:9). But ultimately God vindicated Job. He rebuked Job's so-called friends for judging him (Job 42:7), and he called Job "his servant" (Job 42:7, 8), and blessed "the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12).

Even those who do not live—on earth—to see their vindication have confidence that God is in control and working all things for a good end (Hebrews 11:13–16).

### **Psalm 25:4**

#### **ESV**

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

**What does Psalm 25:4 mean?** Life is a journey, not a single step. This is something David's words recognize with clarity. In this psalm he uses the word "way" four times and "path" twice.

Wisely, David does not lean on his own wisdom for direction in life. Rather, he asks the Lord for guidance. His prayer honors the counsel given in Proverbs 3:5–6. These verses state: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Making our own plans rather than seeking and following God's plans can lead to disaster. Proverbs 14:12 insists, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

Similarly, the apostle James writes: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring... Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:13–15).

**Psalm 25:5****ESV**

Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

**What does Psalm 25:5 mean?** Here continues David's prayer, now asking the Lord to lead him in God's truth and to teach him. Prayer and Scripture were both important to David.

We cannot go astray if we look to the Lord in prayer and obey His Word. Psalm 119:105 states, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." We find guidance in Scripture for the next step as well as for life's long journey. As a righteous Hebrew, David knew that God had delivered His precepts and promises to the people of Israel to keep them in the path of blessing (Deuteronomy 27–30). He knew, too, that God had promised to make Joshua's way successful if Joshua obeyed the Book of the Law (Joshua 1:7–8).

In Psalm 25:5 David calls God his Savior and states that he always waits on Him. Despite the pressures of life, including vicious opposition, David endured by anticipating help from the Lord.

**Psalm 25:6****ESV**

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

**What does Psalm 25:6 mean?** In this verse David reflects upon Jehovah's favors and love, and observes that they have existed "from of old." "Of old" can be literally translated as "from ancient times" or "from eternity." God has always shown mercy and love, but also, He has always *been* merciful and loving. These attributes are part of His nature. Likely, David wrote these words while recalling specific instances when God revealed His mercy and love to Israel and to himself.

In his song of redemption following the Red Sea crossing, Moses referred to both God's mercy and love. He exulted: "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed" (Exodus 15:13). Psalm 106 provides clear evidence of God's steadfast love and mercy by telling how He came to Israel's assistance despite that nation's rebellion. The first verse calls upon Israel to

"Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!"

### **Psalm 25:7**

#### **ESV**

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

**What does Psalm 25:7 mean?** David prays about those things he does not want the Lord to remember, as opposed to those he does want Him to remember. Naturally, David does not want the Lord to remember the sins he committed as a young man. These sins probably included both sins of omission and sins of commission. Because David knew God is merciful and loving, he appeals to Him for pardon.

Youth is certainly a time when passions are strongest and restraint is weakest. In his reply to his critic Zophar, Job said, "You write bitter things against me and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth" (Job 13:26). In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul exhorts Timothy: "Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). While it might seem easier to err in our youth, temptation does not stop when we grow old. But all who put their faith in God, whether young or old, can be triumphant over the temptation to sin. Psalm 119:9 counsels: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."

### **Psalm 25:8**

#### **ESV**

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

**What does Psalm 25:8 mean?** David acknowledges that the Lord is good and morally correct. For those who trust in Him, He never does anything eternally hurtful, but always what is in our best interest. His words and deeds are always right, therefore we can trust God at all times and in every situation. He is so good and upright that He guides sinners to salvation and a life of righteousness.

Isaiah depicts all human beings as sheep wandering away from God (Isaiah 53:6). But in love God provided the way back to Him through Jesus' redemptive

work on the cross. Isaiah 53:6 also says, "the LORD has laid on him [Jesus, the Lamb of God] the iniquity of us all." Although the Lord delights to guide sinners to salvation, many are unwilling to receive His instruction. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

### **Psalm 25:9**

#### **ESV**

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

**What does Psalm 25:9 mean?** God leads the humble to do what is right and teaches the humble His truths. In this context, being "humble" or "meek" does not mean being timid, weak, or shy. It refers to strength under control. C. S. Lewis quipped that "humble" people do not think less of themselves, rather they are people who think of themselves less.

Self-will and pride mark unbelievers, but converted sinners realize they cannot journey through life without God's guidance. The journey presents too many dangers and uncertainties. Therefore, the humble rely on God for direction, and they are not disappointed. Psalm 32:8 counsels us to receive instruction, and the following verse advises us not to be like a horse or mule that lacks understanding and must be forced to submit to the owner's control.

Echoing these sentiments, James 4:6 assures us that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:10 promises, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." Humility is not always held in high esteem in modern culture, but it is a virtue God honors and should characterize all who want to obtain a better knowledge of God and His way.

### **Psalm 25:10**

#### **ESV**

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

**What does Psalm 25:10 mean?** The Lord's way of dealing with those who humbly obey Him is characterized by never-ending care and faithfulness. David

had witnessed the Lord's love and faithfulness in his own life. The Lord had protected him countless times when David faced imminent danger. Even when he was a shepherd boy, David had experienced the Lord's protection from a bear and a lion (1 Samuel 17:34–35). Later, in love and faithfulness, the Lord had given David a decisive victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 17:49–51). He had also given him victory over the Philistines (1 Samuel 23:5) and kept him safe when Saul tried to kill him (1 Samuel 18:11).

In the midst of Lamentations, the writer observes: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22–23). Believers can never exhaust the Lord's love and faithfulness because He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6).

### Survey of Philippians

**Book Type:** Pauline Epistles, also one of four Prison Epistles, 11th book of the New Testament.

**Author:** Paul and Timothy are named as the authors in Philippians 1:1. Paul is traditionally considered the primary author

**Audience:** Philippians is written to a group of believers with whom Paul founded a church, during his second missionary journey in approximately AD 49 (Acts 16). Philippi was a Roman colony, with believers consisting primarily of Gentiles.

This group had donated support to Paul, financially and otherwise, at least three times prior to this letter (Philippians 4:16). They had also delivered another gift through Epaphroditus. This letter, written about 12 years after the founding of the Philippian church, is largely a thank you letter to the Philippians, and as a result is mostly positive. However, because Paul wrote this letter during a time of house arrest in Rome, it includes the major theme of rejoicing during suffering.

Paul personally identified with those who suffer. He had sympathy for the suffering of Philippian believers, and gives much encouragement to help them during times of hardship. Paul also speaks against those who preached out of personal ambition (Philippians 2:3–4; Philippians 1:15–18) and various false teachers (Philippians 3).

**Date:** Approximately AD 60–62, during Paul's first Roman imprisonment.

**Overview:** The focus of the book of Philippians is the proper Christian attitude during times of suffering. Specifically, this is an attitude of rejoicing. Paul encourages believers to rejoice despite suffering (Philippians 1), rejoice through humble service (Philippians 2), focus on Christ during hard times (Philippians 3), and depend on Christ's strength when struggling (Philippians 4).

Chapter 1 includes a brief introduction (Philippians 1:1–2) followed by three key sections. First, Paul gives thanks and prayer on behalf of the Philippian Christians (Philippians 1:3–11). Second, he focuses on the expansion of the gospel (Philippians 1:12–18). Third, he emphasizes to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:19–30).

Chapter 2 emphasizes the theme of rejoicing during times of suffering. First, Paul gives Christ's own example of humility (Philippians 2:1–11). Second, he emphasizes believers as lights in a world of darkness (Philippians 2:12–18). Third, he gives instructions regarding fellow Christian workers Timothy and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:19–30).

Chapter 3 speaks about Christ as the focus during suffering. First, Paul discusses the importance of righteousness through faith in Christ rather than by works (Philippians 3:1–11). Second, Paul talks about straining toward the goal of following Christ (Philippians 3:12–21).

Chapter 4 speaks of Christ's strength in times of suffering. This includes prayers and encouragement (Philippians 4:1–9) and a focus on God's provision (Philippians 4:10–20), followed by a short conclusion (Philippians 4:21–23).

### **Key Verses (ESV)**

**Philippians 1:21:** "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

**Philippians 2:8:** "And being found in human form, [Jesus Christ] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

**Philippians 3:7:** "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

**Philippians 4:4:** "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."

**Philippians 4:6–7:** "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to

God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

**Philippians 4:13:** "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

## Philippians chapter 2 English Standard Version

**1**So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2**complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4**Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6**who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7**but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8**And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9**Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10**so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11**and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**12**Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **13**for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

**14**Do all things without grumbling or disputing, **15**that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **16**holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. **17**Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. **18**Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

## Philippians 2:1

### **ESV**

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

**NIV**

**What does Philippians 2:1 mean?** This verse consists of four main ideas, stemming from the phrase "So if there is..." Verse 2 will explain the expected results of these ideas. Paul's purpose in using these phrases is to emphasize how natural the conclusion should be. Of course, there is encouragement, comfort, affection, and so forth in the Christian life. If these are obvious, then the results—unity, love, and cooperation—should be just as obvious.

The first phrase speaks of "encouragement in Christ." The assumption is that the Philippian believers had experienced much encouragement from Jesus. If they've experienced encouragement, they should be able to encourage others.

Second, Paul mentions "comfort from love." This is another way in which the Philippian Christians had been blessed. Paul mentions love throughout this letter (Philippians 1:9, 16; 2:2; 4:1).

The third phrase refers to "participation in the Spirit." The Holy Spirit had also clearly influenced the Philippians. Paul had mentioned the Spirit in Philippians 1:19 and will again in Philippians 3:3.

The fourth phrase refers to "affection and sympathy." These believers had clearly experienced both of these qualities. In Philippians 1:8, Paul had already mentioned "I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." The word translated "sympathy" is *oiktirmoi*, which can also be translated "mercy," or "compassion." This implies a feeling of relief for the forgiveness of sins, something believers experience at salvation.

**Philippians 2:2****ESV**

complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

**What does Philippians 2:2 mean?** The implication of the previous verse is that the Philippian believers have experienced such positive benefits. This sets up the point Paul makes here in verse 2. Because they had experienced encouragement, fellowship, and mercy, they were to complete Paul's joy in four corresponding ways.

First, they were to be of the "same mind," or united in their purpose and motivations.

Second, they were to be united in love. Paul mentions love throughout this letter (Philippians 1:9, 16; 2:1; 4:1). This has always been a primary hallmark of the Christian (John 13:34–35).

Third, they were to be in "full accord." This is a general reference to unity, apparently a problem for some in the church. There were false teachers promoting Jewish laws, including circumcision, as a requirement for believers. In addition, at least some members were in disagreement with one another (Philippians 4:2). Paul spoke in other places about the need to allow others to have differences of opinion (Romans 14:13–19). So, what he's discussing here is a reference to more serious, divisive problems.

Fourth, they were to be of "one mind." This appears to be similar to the first trait listed of "same mind." However, the wording may simply be poetic or parallel to reflect the four traits in the previous verse. This final concept of "one mind" would then correspond to "any affection and sympathy" in verse 1, revealing a connection between affection and unity.

### **Philippians 2:3**

#### **ESV**

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

**What does Philippians 2:3 mean?** Following his focus on unity in the previous verse, Paul commands his readers to avoid acting in greediness or dishonesty. His goal was to remove focus from self to others. In this, Paul takes a slightly different approach than Christ's statement to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36–40). Instead, he first addresses the motives of wrongful ambition and pride. When these drive our decisions, love and unity are not our true goals.

Instead, Paul taught that Christians ought to treat the needs of others as more important than our own, and other people as greater than us. By putting the needs of others first, believers pursue the kind of humility that leads to mutual love and unity. The emphasis was not on self, but on others. When this is achieved, the overall goal for humility is also met. Paul will continue this area of

teaching by connecting it with the example of Jesus in the following verses (Philippians 2:6–11). Those who put others first exhibit Christ-like character through love and humility.

### **Philippians 2:4**

#### **ESV**

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**What does Philippians 2:4 mean?** The command here is short and simple. Several important observations can be made. First, the command is to each believer. All Christians, regardless of maturity or authority, are supposed to treat others with humility and selflessness. Second, the focus is not exclusively toward others. Paul does not say, "Never look to your own interests." In other words, we are to put the needs of others before our own, but this does not mean we completely avoid caring for our own needs. It's hard to serve other people when your own life, health, or concerns are in ruins.

Third, we are each called to help more than just one person. This is not directed as a single "other," but at all "others." There's a common cultural wisdom for each person to "pay it forward" or "each one reach one." While these sayings have a ring of truth, they don't completely fulfill Paul's teaching in this verse. Believers are called to help "others," serving the needs of a group of people. In the case of the Philippians, this included the congregation that met in a house church. Then, spreading to serve those who did not yet know Christ. And, to helping both believers and unbelievers beyond their community as part of fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

### **Philippians 2:5**

#### **ESV**

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

**What does Philippians 2:5 mean?** This verse serves to set up the poetic description of verses 6–11. The mind Paul refers to is the focus of Christ's life, which is humility. Paul clearly feels this is something the Philippian believers have, or at least have access to, as Christians. The attitude of a believer is to resemble the attitude of Christ. This is made clear in the verses to follow.

In the upcoming passage, Paul will describe how Christ, though God, took the form of a servant, was born human, lived obediently, and died innocently on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8). His humility led to being exalted or lifted up (Philippians 2:9). In a similar way, believers are to live humbly after the example of Jesus. Doing so will please God, and result in our eternal benefit. Paul's focus on the "mind" is clear here and elsewhere in this letter. The Philippians were to have one mind (Philippians 1:27; 2:2). They were not to set their minds on earthly things (Philippians 3:19). In addition, the peace of God would guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). The mind that follows Christ produces a life that obeys Christ.

### **Philippians 2:6**

#### **ESV**

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

**What does Philippians 2:6 mean?** Many Bible translations offset verses 6–11, since they follow a poetic structure used in early hymns in the church. The beginning of this verse refers to Jesus as being "in the form of God." In other words, Jesus and God are equal. Contrary to skeptics who claim the divinity of Jesus was "invented" later in church history, Paul frequently addressed Jesus as divine in his letters.

The second part of this verse notes the stark contrast between how Jesus could have behaved, and how He actually lived. He could have come to earth to demand every person grovel in front of Him. Instead of treating others as His servants, He became a servant to the people He had created. Again, the emphasis on "equality with God" clearly shows Paul's belief that Jesus is equal with God the Father. Yet Jesus did not "grasp" or hold on to His positional authority. He instead came humbly as a servant, giving His life to serve others.

### **Philippians 2:7**

#### **ESV**

but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

**What does Philippians 2:7 mean?** Rather than coming to earth to demand others serve Him, Jesus "emptied himself." This does not mean Jesus stopped

being God. Rather than coming the first time as a king, Jesus chose not to exhibit His unlimited powers. He came to serve rather than to be served (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). He chose the "form" of a servant rather than the "form" of God (Philippians 2:6).

One way Jesus came as a servant was taking on the limitations of a human body. Though eternal, Jesus entered earth as an infant. He was born to His mother Mary, who remained a virgin until His birth (Matthew 1:25). He was born in a humble situation, coming into this world among the animals in a stable, and sleeping in a feed trough (Luke 2:1–7). The first people to visit Him were not kings, but shepherds (Luke 2:8–20). His birth was common, yet His life was anything but common. His humility is emphasized in this verse as the example believers are to follow.

### **Philippians 2:8**

#### **ESV**

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

**What does Philippians 2:8 mean?** The first phrase here completes the thought begun in verse 7: that Jesus came to earth in human form as a servant. In addition, Jesus both was born and died in humility. His humbleness was not for show, but was part of being "obedient." In a similar way, Paul encouraged his readers to be humble in obedience to Christ, following both the example of Jesus and of Paul.

The last phrase of this verse refers to the horrific death of crucifixion. The cross was clearly a symbol of death in first century culture. Paul's mention of it here reminds us that the cross was more than a painful death. It was also a degrading, humiliating form of execution. Jesus did not die as a hero on a battlefield, but instead died innocently and shamefully in public view outside the city walls of Jerusalem. He was mocked, yet endured scorn as part of God's plan for His life as a sacrifice for sinners.

### **Philippians 2:9**

#### **ESV**

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

**What does Philippians 2:9 mean?** The opening word "Therefore" refers to the previous context of verses 6–8. Jesus became the greatest example of a humble servant, through coming to earth in humility, living in obedience, and dying on the cross. As a result, "God has highly exalted him." In the two other places in the Bible where the phrase "highly exalted" is used, we find interesting connections. In 1 Chronicles 14:2, David's kingdom was "highly exalted." In Psalm 47:9, God Himself was "highly exalted." Jesus was highly exalted both as the coming Son of David and as the Lord.

The last phrase of this verse notes that the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:10) is a name honored and empowered above every other name on earth. This name, *Yeshua* in the original Hebrew, means "God saves," and was predicted before His birth. Both Mary and Joseph were told this name while Jesus was still in the womb (Luke 1:31; Matthew 1:21). He fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah by becoming the suffering servant (Isaiah 53) who would live again (1 Corinthians 15) and will one day return to reign forever.

## Philippians 2:10

### **ESV**

so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

**What does Philippians 2:10 mean?** Part of the result of Jesus being highly exalted (Philippians 2:9) is that all people, ultimately, will be in submission to Him. The idea may actually be better expressed by "will bow," referring to something *certain* to happen. This is phrased in terms including every possible being. Those "in heaven" could include angels and saints who have passed away already. Those "on earth" clearly refer to people living now, or more specifically at the time Paul was writing this letter. Those "under the earth" could include those who have already died and perhaps the Devil and evil spirits who must submit to the power of the Lord (Revelation 20).

This understanding is also enhanced after looking at verse 11, which refers to every "tongue" confessing Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. In the future, every being will bow before the Lord, the ultimate reward for the Lord Jesus Christ who became the ultimate servant during His time on earth.

## Philippians 2:11

### ESV

and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**What does Philippians 2:11 mean?** This concludes the hymn of verses 6–11. Paul touches on one final aspect of the exaltation of Jesus, with a focus on the glory of God. In addition to every knee bowing before Jesus (Philippians 2:10), all people will, one day, admit that He is God and Messiah. God's preference is that this happens in life, while there is a chance for salvation (2 Peter 3:9), rather than after death, when it is too late (Revelation 20:15).

This inevitable victory will bring glory to God the Father. The glory of God is a common scriptural theme, seen both in the Old Testament (Psalm 19:1; 106:20; Proverbs 25:2) as well as several times in the New Testament. Jesus spoke of God's glory (John 11:4, 40). Stephen saw the glory of God before his death (Acts 7:55). All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Believers rejoice in the hope of the "glory of God" (Romans 5:2). In fact, believers are to do all things for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Revelation notes the glory of God on three occasions (15:8; 21:11, 23), with the glory of God ultimately giving light to the new heavens and earth.

## Philippians 2:12

### ESV

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

**What does Philippians 2:12 mean?** This verse transitions from Paul's focus on Christ's humility in to the need for Christians to live out their faith for the world to see. He notes his transition by the use of "therefore," referring to his readers as "my beloved" or loved ones. Paul will also use this reference to the Philippian Christians in Philippians 4:1. In both contexts, his focus is to emphasize his love for his readers while also giving them a command to obey.

Paul notes the Philippians have faithfully followed his teachings whether he was with them, or not. Following a teacher's instruction when they are not present is the ultimate test of loyalty, and the Philippian Christians have done exactly that. During their years apart, Paul kept in contact with this group of believers.

Chapter 4 discusses several times they had sent him financial contributions to assist him in his ministry.

Paul also gives a command using a strange and often misunderstood phrase: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." This unique remark speaks of ongoing obedience for those already saved. It's crucial to note that Paul is not telling them to work *for* their salvation. This statement implies a need to live out—to practice, demonstrate, and exhibit—the salvation which believers have in Christ.

The concept of "fear and trembling" addresses worshipful respect for God. This echoes back to the context of every knee bowing before the Lord mentioned in verse 11.

### **Philippians 2:13**

#### **ESV**

for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

**What does Philippians 2:13 mean?** In verse 12, Paul commands the Philippian Christians to "work out [their] own salvation," meaning they are to put the truth of their belief into practice. What they are in Christ needs to be "worked out" through their actions and attitudes. The reason for this command is given here in verse 13: God is acting through the lives of these believers. This understanding should lead believers to a deep sense of awe and appreciation.

Paul then adds two areas in which God operates in the life of the believer. First, God works in us to "will" His good pleasure. This includes the idea of placing desires or leading a believer to serve the Lord.

Second, God works in us "to work" for His good pleasure. God's Spirit in the believer gives both the desire and the strength to live for the Lord. "Work" appears as a common theme in this letter (Philippians 1:6; 2:12, 25, 30; 4:3). The idea of "his good pleasure" involves obedience (Philippians 2:12) according to God's Spirit. This is not the legalistic obedience of the law that Paul speaks against in the false teachings of the circumcision group, but rather obedience based on a love for God based on the Spirit living within the believer.

## Philippians 2:14

### ESV

Do all things without grumbling or disputing,

**What does Philippians 2:14 mean?** This verse is short, but clear, and difficult to misunderstand. The command word "do" is the first Greek word in the statement, adding emphasis to the mandate. The direction is given without exceptions, aiming the intent at everything a believer does. The immediate context is work within the local church, and the body of believers. However, the intent is clearly meant to include all of a Christian's life.

The idea of "without grumbling" is from a Greek term, *gongysmōn*, dealing with murmuring or complaining. Those who live to please God should refrain from complaining about serving Christ. We serve in "fear and trembling" not "grumbling or disputing."

The idea of "disputing" includes arguments and quarrels. Those who serve the Lord should not be known for arguing, but for humble service. A biblical example of the results of complaining can be found in Numbers 13–14. The Israelites complained repeatedly in the wilderness despite God's generous provisions. The result was judgment rather than reward for obedience.

## Philippians 2:15

### ESV

that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

**What does Philippians 2:15 mean?** Living without grumbling or disputing (Philippians 2:14) makes a person "blameless and innocent." Being blameless is a goal both of believers in general and especially of church leaders (1 Timothy 3:2). Spiritually speaking, this is not a reference to sin or morality, but whether or not a person can be rightfully criticized by other people.

The goal of not grumbling or disputing is not to boast, but rather to live in a way explicitly different from the depraved world we find ourselves in. All true believers are children of God (John 1:12–14). However, to live without blemish as God's children requires diligent effort. Part of the reason this is difficult is because of the sin inherent to the world around us. Believers are to be in the

world, not of it, leading to difficult situations, and temptation. Yet believers are called to stand out as unique and powerful examples: "lights in the world." Paul's words closely resemble Jesus who taught, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

## **Philippians 2:16**

### **ESV**

holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

**What does Philippians 2:16 mean?** An obedient believer is a person who holds fast to the gospel and the truths of God. When Paul wrote these words, the New Testament had not yet been completed or compiled. This is not an explicit reference to written Scripture, per se. Paul's reference to the "word of life" appears to point to Jesus, referred to as the word of life in 1 John 1:1.

Paul then adds that, when Christ returns, he wants to be proud. Paul wants to know that his efforts in Philippi were for a good cause, not a waste of time. This church was a bright spot in his ministry; he does not want them to fall to the sins of the world and destroy the good work he had invested in them. This concern is not about personal pride, but rather about investing his life into people who were productive in serving the Lord. Paul was already under much difficulty as a prisoner in Rome. He desired to take joy in the lives of those in the Philippian church rather than find discouragement that they might turn in disobedience toward Christ (Philippians 2:15).

## **Philippians 2:17**

### **ESV**

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

**What does Philippians 2:17 mean?** Paul describes his joy at being able to serve, though he does refer to his life as a "drink offering." This refers to the Old Testament practice of pouring a drink offering in worship (Numbers 15:1–10; 28:1–8). After a priest would sacrifice a lamb, ram, or bull, he would pour wine beside the altar. This symbolized the dedication of a person in worship to God.

In Paul's life, he felt his life was being poured out as an act of worship on behalf of those he served. Even if his imprisonment ended in death, he could have joy regarding his life that had been poured out in service to God. At the end of his life, Paul would make a similar statement: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (2 Timothy 4:6). The drink offering and death, or end of service, was closely associated.

## **Philippians 2:18**

### **ESV**

Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

**What does Philippians 2:18 mean?** This verse extends Paul's joy in being used to serve others as an invitation to his readers. Just as Paul was glad and rejoiced, he wanted his readers to be glad as well. Verses 14–17 deal with some difficult, negative aspects of life Paul needed to address. Because his focus in this letter is positive, he quickly transitioned back to a positive tone of joy. Joy has been mentioned multiple times to this point in Paul's letter (Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2).

The next verse begins a section designed to bring joy to Paul's readers. The chapter also ends with a focus on joy (Philippians 2:29) and begins the next chapter with rejoicing (Philippians 3:1). Chapter 4 likewise emphasizes joy (Philippians 4:1), includes more emphasis on rejoicing (Philippians 4:4, 10) and ends with many positive greetings (Philippians 4:21–23). Joy was clearly an emphasis of his letter to the Philippians.

## Matthew chapter 21

**23**And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” **24**Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. **25**The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ **26**But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was 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 do these things.

**28**“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ **29**And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. **30**And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. **31**Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before 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 when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

### Context Summary

Matthew 21:23–27 finds Jesus in the temple as He is challenged by priests and elders. They want to know by what authority Jesus acts. He agrees to answer if they will answer Him: Was John the Baptist's baptism from heaven or from earth? The religious leaders know that if they say he was a prophet, Jesus will ask why they didn't believe and repent. If they say John was not a prophet, though, the people will be upset. They say they don't know. Jesus does not answer their question.

### Matthew 21:23

#### ESV

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

**What does Matthew 21:23 mean?** The tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders continues to heat up as this week progresses. The "priests" approaching Him here held official leadership positions in the temple. They were likely members of the religious ruling body known as the Sanhedrin. They were less popular than the Pharisees but had more power since they were politically connected to the Romans. The elders with them were probably not priests but may have been from influential Jewish families and may have been on the Sanhedrin, as well.

Together, this group has come up with a question for Jesus and approached Him while He is teaching in the temple, probably somewhere in the outer courts. The question, itself, is actually a good one—but it's being asked in an insincere and corrupted way. It's not that this group wonders if they should listen to Christ. Rather, their motive is to stop Jesus from teaching, or possibly to discredit Him with the people by accusing Him of heresy.

By "these things," they mean to ask why Jesus thinks He can enter Jerusalem receiving the praise of the crowds as if He were the king and Messiah (Matthew 21:1–11), chasing the money-changers out of the temple (Matthew 21:12–13), and healing the lame and blind in the temple courts (Matthew 21:14–15). After all, Jesus does not hold any position of official human authority beyond being known as a "rabbi," teacher. He is not a member of the Sanhedrin or an officially commissioned priest or Pharisee or scribe. What gives Him the right to act and teach in these ways?

Jesus, knowing their motives, will not answer their question directly. The parables He provides, however, along with His other teachings, make the answer clear to those who sincerely want to know (John 5:19–24). Those who will come to believe in Him, though, will understand that Jesus acts and speaks under the authority of His Father, who is God. He represents God on earth and acts with the full authority of God in all He says and does.

### **Matthew 21:24**

#### **ESV**

Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.

**What does Matthew 21:24 mean?** This exchange between Jesus and some religious leaders of Israel was not unusual in its form. Jewish rabbis loved to debate, posing questions to each other, answering questions with questions,

and making witty or pointed remarks. They liked to add a competitive edge to their discussions of the law and theology. The pattern of counter-questions and challenges was, itself, nothing new.

Though the conversational style seemed familiar, the stakes were far higher than usual. They had asked by whose authority Christ healed and taught in the temple (Matthew 21:23). Soon, these men will use their authority to condemn Him and hand Him over to the Romans for execution (Matthew 17:22–23). Jesus is fully aware of their motives, yet He responds with deadly seriousness. He would be raised on the third day, despite their efforts—they, however, were facing the eternal judgment of God (John 3:36).

Instead of answering their question directly, Jesus followed His normal pattern and asked one of His own. This time, though, He agrees to answer if they will answer His question. His brilliant request in the following verse will silence them for now (Matthew 21:25). The parables Jesus provides immediately afterwards, along with His other statements, answer the original question, indicating that Jesus acts by the authority of God (John 5:19–24).

### **Matthew 21:25**

#### **ESV**

The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’

**What does Matthew 21:25 mean?** Some chief priests and elders of Israel have asked Jesus a pointed question: what gives you the right to teach, heal, and accept praise from the people (Matthew 21:23)? These are powerful men with the authority to condemn Jesus and turn Him over to the Romans, as they soon will (Matthew 17:22–23). They are hoping His answer will give them reason to do exactly that. Jesus, of course, knows this. If He tells them He is acting by the authority of the one and only God, His own Father, they will accuse Him of blasphemy and perhaps arrest Him immediately. Rather than invite a confrontation, Jesus agrees to answer them on one condition: that they answer His question first (Matthew 21:24).

The query posed by Jesus forces the men to state their position on John the Baptist: whether he was a legitimate prophet sent from God or a pretender. While the question these men originally asked Jesus was not wrong, itself, their motive was corrupt. Jesus' counter-question brilliantly shows this. What these men really care about is power, and control, not sincere faith.

As a result, the group of powerful men huddles up to talk through their strategy. They quickly realize Jesus has put them in a no-win scenario. If they say John the Baptist's message was divine, Jesus can accuse them of ignoring the messenger of God. The alternative, to claim John was a fraudulent teacher, would be immensely unpopular and go against their real motive of maintaining power (Matthew 21:26). What seemed like an easy way to trap Jesus has become a snare for these men.

John the Baptist also had at least one confrontation with a group of Pharisees and Sadducees. He famously called them a "brood of vipers" and warned of the judgment coming on those in Israel who do not bear spiritual fruit (Matthew 3:7–10).

### **Matthew 21:26**

#### **ESV**

But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

**What does Matthew 21:26 mean?** Jesus has agreed to answer a pointed question from a group of chief priests and elders on one condition: They must answer His question first. He has asked them whether the work of John the Baptist was from heaven or from man (Matthew 21:23–24). Their question, as posed, was legitimate. However, their motives were not: the men who challenged Christ were not sincerely seeing an answer, but an excuse to catch Jesus saying something that would make Him guilty of blasphemy.

With Jesus' counter-question, those hypocritical leaders are now stuck. If they say that John's baptism was from heaven, the obvious implication is that they're disobeying God. Of course, that's not what these priests and elders think, but here they admit they are afraid to tell the truth. John the Baptist was popular with the people. The crowds of Israelites who flocked to see John and be baptized by him believed the man was a legitimate prophet sent from God.

In admitting this, even to each other, these priests and elders will reveal just how dishonest and political they really are. Jesus knew this, of course, when He posed the question to them. In a way, His response was, in fact, an answer to their original challenge. If Israel's religious leaders had believed John was a true prophet from God, they would have believed his message about the Messiah, whom he identified as Jesus.

These men have an opportunity, of sorts, to at least demonstrate integrity. The honest answer—albeit the unpopular one—would be to say they thought John the Baptist was not from God. And yet, their first commitment is not to the truth but to their own security. It's the same reason they refuse to see that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus has trapped them in this moment behind the wall of their own dishonesty and unbelief. Their public response will make this clear (Matthew 21:27).

### **Matthew 21:27**

#### **ESV**

So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

**What does Matthew 21:27 mean?** Jesus has forced those who challenged His authority into a corner by posing a question of His own (Matthew 21:23–26). In essence, He has asked whether or not John the Baptist was a true prophet. These chief priests and elders could not say yes, of course, or everyone would want to know why they did not believe John. At the same time, they realize that telling the truth—that they did not believe John—would lose the support of the many people who had a positive view of John.

This reply proves these so-called leaders are willing to put partisan control over the truth. Their real priority is maintaining leverage over the people they are supposed to be leading. They would rather keep their true convictions hidden, even about something as important as whether a messenger is a prophet from God. Rather than allow their generation to challenge and disrespect them, they choose to be silent. Their integrity is being tested, and they fail miserably. Their motive for confronting Jesus was dishonest, and so is their attempt to avoid His question.

So, they now reply in the weakest, lamest way possible for men who prided themselves on their ability to debate: "We do not know." Since they did not meet His condition, Jesus tells them He won't answer their question, either. Jesus defused their attempt to catch Him speaking blasphemy by simply asking them to tell the truth about their religious convictions. They would not.

Jesus' overall message (John 5:19–24), along with the theme of the parables He is about to tell, provide an answer to the initial challenge. Christ acts under the power and authority of God.

**Matthew 21:28****ESV**

“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’

**What does Matthew 21:28 mean?** This continues a conversation between Jesus and a group of priests and elders. They attempted to goad Jesus into making a statement they could use against Him, and He replied by proving that they lacked sincere convictions (Matthew 21:23–27). Despite their attempt to avoid admitting disobedience, Jesus will now use a parable to illustrate why the least "religious" people in Israel would enter the kingdom of God before these self-important figures. These powerful men very likely wished at this point that they had not picked this fight with Jesus.

Jesus launches into this story directly from His prior comment by posing another scenario for them to answer. The theme of this parable will, again, bring up their rejection of John the Baptist. Jesus describes a man with two sons. The man tells both boys, first one and then the other, to go work in a vineyard for the day. The sons will answer and then do two different things.

**Matthew 21:29****ESV**

And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went.

**What does Matthew 21:29 mean?** While teaching in the temple, Jesus was confronted by chief priests and elders who tried to trip Him up with a question. That did not go as His enemies planned, as Jesus' counter-question forced them into a cowardly attempt to hide their real motives (Matthew 21:23–27). Pressing the issue, Jesus begins a parable involving a man with two sons. The man tells the first son to go and work in the vineyard for the day.

The first son initially refuses to do what his father has asked. In that moment, the son is not just being disobedient—he is being *defiant*. He directly says he will not comply. However, that hard-headed response eventually gives way and the son winds up doing exactly what his father wanted all along. This parable is meant to contrast those who initially respond to God with defiance, but later come to faith, with those who make a show of obedience but never really obey (Matthew 21:30).

In the following verse, Jesus describes a second son who follows the second pattern, doing exactly the opposite of the first son.

### **Matthew 21:30**

#### **ESV**

And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.

**What does Matthew 21:30 mean?** Jesus is telling a parable to illustrate a powerful and devastating point to some of Israel's religious leaders (Matthew 21:28–29). In context, this is a direct criticism of their hypocritical attacks on Jesus, while they themselves ignore the will of God (Matthew 21:23–27). In the first half of the parable, a man's son initially refuses to obey a command to work, but then changes his mind and cooperates.

The man tells his second son to go work in the vineyard. This one answers his father very respectfully. Despite initial appearances, however, that son doesn't do as he is told. As part of the parable, this is meant to depict men like those who have recently attacked Jesus. They give the appearance of obedience and honor to the Father, but in truth they are disobedient. This is in contrast to those whose spiritual state seems despicably defiant (Matthew 21:31), but who will eventually come to faith.

### **Matthew 21:31**

#### **ESV**

Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

**What does Matthew 21:31 mean?** After defusing their attempted trap (Matthew 21:23–27), Jesus has asked some chief priests and elders another question, this time about a parable (Matthew 21:28–30). He has described two sons whose father separately instructs them to go work in the vineyard.

The first son is openly defiant, telling his father he won't obey. Later, however, he changes his mind and does exactly as he was told. The second son gives the polite, seemingly obedient answer, but never actually does what his father commanded.

Here Jesus asks these religious leaders His question: Which son did his father's will? They answer the only way they can: The son who did the work, even though he first said no, is the one who did the father's will. The father wanted action, not just words. The one who acted obeyed. Despite the first son's initial rudeness, his change of heart meant he came to obey and honor his father. The second son, on the other hand, never really honored his father, as proven by the fact that he only *talked* about obedience—he did not actually obey (John 14:15).

Now Jesus lowers the boom. His statement would have landed like a slap in the face. The examples of prostitutes and Jewish men who collected taxes for the Romans were not random choices by Jesus. Combined, these stereotypes summed up the worst of the worst in Israel's sense of religious purity: wretched, wicked, traitorous, dirty, and despicable. In fact, they were considered outsiders to Israel's religious community. They were lower than nobodies.

And yet, Jesus is claiming *those very people* would enter God's kingdom ahead of the most religious and powerful men in Israel. The parable just given, further explained in the next verse (Matthew 21:32), shows Jesus is still talking about belief in the message of John the Baptist. Many prostitutes and tax collectors believed and repented—moving from defiance of God to submission (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). The Jewish religious leaders would merely pretend to submit, but never really obey (John 5:39–40; Matthew 23:27).

### **Matthew 21:32**

#### **ESV**

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 when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

**What does Matthew 21:32 mean?** The contrast between Jesus Christ and His critics in this passage is striking. When they attempted to trap Jesus, He proved that they were too cowardly to tell the truth about their beliefs (Matthew 21:23–27). Jesus immediately follows that lesson with a parable that contrasts pretentious hypocrisy with eventual submission. Then, He boldly tells the most respected and powerful men in Israel that prostitutes and traitorous tax collectors will find heaven before they do. His ability to fearlessly speak hard truth comes as their cowardly answer to His challenge is still hanging in the air.

Jesus' parable (Matthew 21:28–30) contrasted two sons. The first defied his father at first, then obeyed. The second seemed to agree, at first, but never

complied. Obviously, it was the first, and not the second, who was truly obedient. With this in mind, Jesus has pointed out that tax collectors and the prostitutes have heeded the message of John the Baptist. They repented from their sin and were baptized by John. They initially said no to the commands of God—evidenced by lives of sin and selfishness—and then turned and began to obey Him (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

The Jewish religious leaders did exactly the opposite. They publicly and repeatedly said yes to God in every way they could, but this was ultimately all for show (Matthew 23:27). When God sent John the Baptist to them as a prophet and called them to repent from their sinful actions, these religious men refused to do so. Even when those society dismissed as despicable sinners believed and repented, the elders, scribes, and Pharisees refused to do so. They *would not* believe and obey (John 5:39–40).

Jesus tells them that John came to them in the way of righteousness. This means that, unlike them, John truly lived righteously before God. He did not merely say the right words and look good standing in the temple. He did what God told Him to do, and he kept doing it. From that position of righteous living, John called the Israelites to repent and join Him. Again, the religious leaders refused to do so.