

Saying Yes With Your Life

Matthew 21:23–32

Rev. Cheryl Farr | September 27, 2026

Sermon Theme

God cares less about religious talk than obedient hearts turned toward Him.

Big Idea

There is a difference between saying yes to God and living yes to God. Jesus calls us beyond good intentions and religious words into lives that actually move in His direction.

What the Passage Shows Us

Jesus tells of two sons. One says no to his father but later changes his mind and goes to work in the vineyard. The other says yes but never goes.

The first son begins with rebellion but ends in obedience. The second sounds obedient but never follows through.

Jesus uses the story to challenge religious leaders who knew the right words but refused to respond when God called them to repentance.

A No Does Not Have to Be Final

The first son gives us hope because Jesus does not define him by his first answer.

He says no, but later he turns and goes.

Repentance is not simply feeling sorry for what we have done. It is a change in direction. Grace allows yesterday's no to become today's yes.

Our past does not have to determine our future with God.

Grace Makes Room for a New Direction

Jesus points to tax collectors and prostitutes, people respectable society had already judged and dismissed. They heard John's call to repentance and responded.

Jesus is not saying their sin did not matter. He is saying their sin did not put them beyond grace.

God's grace reaches people wherever they are and calls them toward something new.

The Church should be a place where changed lives are celebrated, not a place where people are forever defined by who they used to be.

Religious Words Are Not Enough

The second son says exactly what his father wants to hear: "I will, sir."

But he never goes.

It is possible to know Christian language, attend worship, pray, sing, study Scripture, and still resist what God is asking us to do.

We can say yes to forgiveness while holding onto resentment.

We can say yes to generosity while refusing to give.

We can say yes to loving our neighbor until the neighbor becomes difficult.

We can say yes to following Jesus as long as He leads us somewhere comfortable.

Jesus asks whether our lives say the same thing our mouths say.

Obedience Is Where the Yes Becomes Real

Faith is more than good intentions.

Our trust in Christ should eventually become visible in the way we live.

Does our faith produce mercy?

Does it make us more forgiving?

Does it make us more generous, patient, compassionate, and willing to serve?

Does following Jesus change the way we treat people?

A life turned toward God will not be perfect, but it should be moving in His direction.

Perfection Is Not the Same as Direction

The first son was not perfect. He began by refusing his father.

But his direction changed.

That gives us a better question than, “Have I always gotten it right?”

We can ask instead:

Which direction am I moving now?

Am I becoming more merciful or more bitter?

More generous or more guarded?

More willing to forgive or more determined to keep score?

More open to God’s leading or more committed to my own comfort?

Repentance tells the truth about our direction. Grace gives us the freedom to change it.

Saying Yes With Your Life

God may be calling us to forgive someone, serve someone, let go of resentment, change a habit, give generously, make peace, or simply take the next faithful step.

This passage is not meant to help us identify everyone else’s hypocrisy. It invites us to listen for our own.

Jesus exposes the gap between our words and our lives so that we can turn toward Him.

The vineyard is still there.

The Father still calls.

And our last no does not have to be our next answer.

Key Truths

- A past no does not have to be our final answer to God.
- Repentance is a change of direction, not simply regret.
- Grace reaches people others may have written off.
- Religious language cannot replace obedience.
- God’s grace meets us where we are and calls us forward.
- A life turned toward God will increasingly show the fruit of grace.
- We are not called to perfection before we follow. We are called to keep moving toward Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there an area where I have been saying yes to God with my words but no with my life?
2. Where might God be asking me to change direction?
3. Is there someone whose past I have allowed to define them even though God is doing something new?
4. What would saying yes to God look like in one practical way this week?

Takeaway

God is not looking for polished religious talk. He is looking for hearts turned toward Him.

Your first answer does not have to be your final answer.

By grace, you can still turn.

You can still go.

You can still **say yes with your life**.

Key Verse

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

Matthew 21:31a, NIV