

**Matthew 21:28-32**  
**GOD AND THE YES-MAN**

[Jesus speaking] *But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, Son, go, work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not. But afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir! But he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, The first. Jesus said to them, Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him. And when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.*

It's a common idea--everybody likes a yes-man. A yes-man agrees with your every opinion, never contradicts you, always does what you say. What a friend! But I think you can see that a yes-man is not the best—whether it's you as yes-man to your friend, or your friend as a yes-man to you. Sometimes truth needs to be spoken. The Pharisees did not like Jesus, because Jesus was not their yes-man. He contradicted most of their ideas. He frequently associated with those whom they would not “touch.”

This text with its parable of the Two Sons was spoken by Jesus in Jerusalem two days after Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday, to the dismay of the Chief Priests and Pharisees, the crowds had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as the long-promised and long-awaited “king” descended from great King David's royal line. They acclaimed Him as the God-sent Savior of the people and the nation. “Hosanna! to the Son of David!” they had shouted—“Come, save us now, O royal King!” On the next day, again to the dismay of the Chief Priests and Pharisees, Jesus chased the buyers, sellers, and money changers out of the temple, reminding all that God's house was a house of prayer. There He mercifully received and healed the blind and the lame—for free. To the further dismay of the leaders, children nearby were saying, Hosanna! to the Son of David. They reported it to Jesus, expecting that He should halt such conduct. He did not; He quoted to them the Old Testament verse “Out of the mouths of babes You have perfected praise” (Psalm 8:2). If Jesus had been “for” the leaders, likely none of these situations would have bothered them. It's surprising what one will tolerate when it involves a personal fan or support-man. That's a reason why pastors seek to steer down the middle of the road when it comes to congregational friendships, lest it affect congregational decisions and actions.

By the second day after Palm Sunday, the leaders had had their fill. They confronted Jesus, demanding where He had gotten authority to do all these things! However, when they would not publicly answer Jesus' question about John the Baptist's authority, He did not answer theirs. They knew if they said John's authority came from God, Jesus would say they should have listened. If they said it was from man, they feared the crowds. Were they really so much concerned about knowing His source of authority, or was their concern His turning the common people away from honoring them to honoring Him? There was no need for Him to answer their question. He was not their yes-man.

To get them to see why He opposed to them, Jesus spoke the Parable of the Two Sons. In the parable the father directed each son to work in the vineyard. The first son flat out refused, “No way!” And what would have been the father's re-action? Likely anger and disgust. On the other hand, when the second son said, “Yes, sir!” what do you suppose the father's first thought was? Probably, “That's more like it!”

Of the two sons which, do you suppose, the leaders would have said they resembled when it came to obeying God? Surely the Yes-sir son! They strove hard to keep all the rules and regulations of the Old Testament—counting out even an exact tenth of their garden herbs and spices so as to tithe for God. (I wonder if they were more concerned about short-changing God, or shortchanging themselves?!) They calculated the number of steps one could walk on the Sabbath Day without breaking the law of “Rest.” They would not take an oath in the name of the LORD, JEHOVAH, lest they blaspheme His Name. These leaders thought they were God's loyal “yes-men.” They thought they were the best “yes-men God could ever have. Everyone should be so righteous as they!

Likewise, they would have felt that the “sinners” of the day were the No-way son in the parable. Tax collectors, worked for the conquering Romans and lined their own pockets with excess charges from their own countrymen. Samaritans had an ancestry that was but partly Jewish, and Samaritan worship was but partly based

on the Old-Testament Then there were the despicable harlots, the prostitutes, the “whores,” who trampled God’s command vs. adultery. So many undesirables! So many living in disobedience to clear words of God, saying to God “No way!” right from the “get-go.” The leaders were much better “sons” than these sinners.

But, as the parable goes on, the No-way son had time to think it over, realized his sin, repented, and with a change of heart went to work—willingly. On the other hand, the Yes-sir! son never showed up at all! With whom was the father pleased? Who had done the will of the father? Even the leaders had to admit, that first one, the No-way son, had done the father’s will. The Yes-sir son had not. This is where Jesus was steering the self-righteous leaders. In spite of all their Yes’s, was God well pleased with them? No. Their yes’s were only on the surface, like the answer of the Yes-sir son. In their hearts they had ungodly intents--money, hatred, lust. Their hearts and confidence were focused on their own “wonderful” performance of God’s rules—at least on the surface—not on God’s mercy and forgiveness in the promised Messiah, the sacrifice for the sins of the world. They thought they were the perfect yes-men, and they wanted Jesus to be their yes-man to extol their praises. Could they see how displeased God was with their lives? *These people draw near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me (Matthew 15:8).*

This text isn’t just to tell us of the hearts and lives of some men long ago. It’s also a text for you. Do you operate as the Yes-sir son, and as the Yes-sir Pharisees, serving God on the surface only? Today did you come to hear the Word of God with a “Sir!” on your lips, but during the week are Word and Scriptures are the last thing in your mind? Is your week is all work, work, work, socialize, socialize, socialize, recreation, recreation, recreation (shall we say “sports”), entertainment, entertainment, entertainment? Are you just a Yes-sir son? Is God there on the surface of your life, but not in your heart? Are you a yes-man in speech on Sunday morning speaking God’s name in the verses, prayers, and hymns, but then the rest of the week His name is only on your lips in cursing others, or taking oaths needlessly---pledging and swearing on God’s name--that you speak truth? Do you confess the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Creed, but during the rest of the week the very topic of the Christian faith is somehow taboo?

We make good yes-men too, don’t we? We see the wrongs of others—the drunks, drug users, live-ins, adulterers, child-abusers, the liberal wing of Christianity, the liberal wing of Lutheranism. We trumpet how they all say No-way to God without batting an eye.

What about the No-way son and the No-way people? Does God want them to sin? No. Does God give them a pass to continue committing these sins? No. Yet, like the No-way son in the parable, when one of them repents, seeking the Lord’s forgiveness, the Lord receives them in love and joy. Jesus loves them dearly. Like a shepherd finding his lost sheep. He welcomes them in His arms and welcomes them back into His kingdom. The same is true for you.

It may seem odd to put it this way, but God wants you to be like the disobedient son who defiantly said No! Not that God wants you to be disobedient. God wants you to repent, to see how unacceptable you and your hearts and actions are. He wants you to see His mercy in Christ for a clean, fresh start each day, and each hour. In Jesus you are forgiven. You don’t have to wait until the end of the day, to ask for forgiveness after crossing God’s line. Immediately take your shame to your Father. Forgive me for the lie I just told, forgive me for the harsh words I just spoke—all for Jesus’ sake. Do so right away. The Lord promises, *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:18).*

This is what Jesus wanted the leaders to see. He told them point-blank, *Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you! For John [the Baptist] came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him. And when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.* In other words: “You are arrogant, self-centered, people. In your hearts you repeatedly ignore His message bringing the news of His righteousness and holiness credited to your account freely by faith, not by merit, all through the Promised One. You saw how the ‘sinners’ were received with God’s forgiveness in the baptism of John? But you stayed away. You think your yes-Sir activities of the surface are your holiness before God. They are not. Therefore, I will not be your yes-man. I stand by the ‘sinners’—repentant sinners.”

The washing away of sin, dear Christian, is for you too. Be a real yes-man before God. “Yes, I have displeased You. I need Your forgiveness in Jesus. In your mercy wash me clean. Grant me the Holy Spirit and a willing heart to do better.” Go forward and serve Him!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---