

Love Letters Before the Cross

Week 1: “The Love That Calls You Back”

 *Matthew 21:28–32 (CSB)*

Timeline and Context

- It's Tuesday of Passion Week. Days before the cross, Jesus is still teaching.
- The shouts of “*Hosanna!*” have faded. The same people who celebrated Him now question His authority (*Matthew 21:23*).
- Jesus stands in the Temple courts, surrounded by religious leaders who look righteous outwardly but are far from God.
- Instead of debating them, He tells a story — the **Parable of the Two Sons** — not to shame but to save.

“Even now, even after all your pride and pretense, there’s still time to turn back.”

Expository Walkthrough

v.28 — The Father’s Call

“What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘My son, go work in the vineyard today.’”

- The father represents God; the vineyard represents His Kingdom.
- This isn’t about earning wages — it’s about joining the Father in His work.
- God invites His children into relationship, not performance.

Isaiah 5:1–2 (CSB): *“I will sing about the one I love, a song about my loved one’s vineyard: The one I love had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He broke up the soil, cleared it of stones, and planted it with the finest vines. He built a tower in the middle of it and even dug out a winepress there. He expected it to yield good grapes, but it yielded worthless grapes.”*

John 15:16 (CSB): *“You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.”*

Reflection: God still calls each of us into His vineyard. How will you respond?

v.29 — The First Son: Rebellion and Repentance

“He answered, ‘I don’t want to,’ but later he changed his mind and went.”

- At first, he refuses — but later repents.
- The Greek word means *to turn, to change one’s mind*.
- This son pictures sinners and rebels who later respond to grace.

2 Peter 3:9 (CSB): *“The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.”*

Acts 3:19 (CSB): *“Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out.”*

Truth: Repentance doesn’t erase your past; it redirects your future.

Reflection: Where do you need to turn back to the Father today?

v.30 — The Second Son: Promise and Pretense

“Then the man went to the other and said the same thing. ‘I will, sir,’ he answered, but he didn’t go.”

- This son says the right thing but never follows through.
- He represents the danger of *religion without repentance* — saying “yes” with words but “no” with life.

James 1:22 (CSB): *“But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*

Warning: It’s possible to appear faithful and still be far from God. **Reflection:** Is your obedience genuine, or just performance?

vv.31–32 — The Confrontation and Invitation

“Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.”

- Jesus exposes religious hypocrisy and extends grace.
- The “sinners” repented — the self-righteous refused.
- His point: *It’s not where you started; it’s whether you turned.*

Romans 2:4 (CSB): *“Do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”*

Encouragement: There’s still room in the Kingdom; if you’ll repent. Even now, Jesus invites hearts to return.

The Faithful Son — The Gospel Connection

- Both sons fail — one disobeys, one deceives.
- But there stands a third Son — the **Faithful Son**, Jesus Himself.
- He obeyed perfectly, loved completely, and surrendered fully.

Philippians 2:8 (CSB): *“He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.”*

Through His obedience, our rebellion can be forgiven. Our failed “yes” can be covered by His grace.

Truth: This isn’t just a story of confrontation — it’s an invitation to grace.

Takeaways

1 God still calls — even when we’ve said no.

- The Father’s invitation to His vineyard still stands.
- He’s not looking for perfection but for repentance — a heart that turns back to Him.

Hebrews 3:15: *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

Truth: Every “no” can become a “yes” through repentance. His love still calls you back.

Reflection: Where have you been resisting God’s call to obedience? What might your “yes” look like today?

2 Repentance isn't weakness — it's freedom.

- Repentance isn't a punishment; it's the path to peace and restoration.
- It's not about guilt; it's about grace — the moment when you stop running and start returning.

Psalms 32:5: *"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin."*

Truth: Repentance doesn't erase your past; it redirects your future.

Reflection: What areas of your life need to be brought into the light so God can bring healing?

3 Religion without surrender is still rebellion.

- It's possible to say "yes" with lips but "no" with life.
- God doesn't want empty words — He wants willing hearts.

Isaiah 29:13 (CSB): *"The Lord said: These people approach me with their speeches to honor me with lip-service—yet their hearts are far from me, and human rules direct their worship of me."*

Truth: Obedience is not about looking faithful — it's about living surrendered.

Reflection: Where might your actions need to catch up to your confession?

Response — The Love That Calls You Back

Jesus told this parable not to condemn but to invite.

Even as the cross drew near, He was still offering second chances.

This week, pause and let His kindness lead you to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Ask yourself:

- What "no" do I need to turn into a "yes"?
- How can I live out repentance, not just speak it?
- Where is God calling me to serve, obey, or forgive?

Take time to pray, reflect, journal, or talk with someone you trust.

Let this story remind you that grace still calls your name — and that it's never too late to come home.