

Our Yes For 2023

We spent Advent looking at Mary's Yes and Joseph's Yes and Christmas Sunday we talked about God's Yes and Jesus' Yes for us. The Father so loved the world that he gave his son. The Father said Yes. Jesus so loved the world that he set aside his might and glory, emptied himself and became a servant, giving his life as a ransom to redeem us from our sin. Jesus said Yes to becoming a baby born of a woman. Mary said Yes to redemption's plan and became the mother of Jesus. Joseph said Yes and took Mary as his wife and raised Jesus as his own Son. The Father and Son and Mary and Joseph did all they could do. Now the choice is up to us. Will we say yes? What will your answer be? I'm saying Yes to Jesus. Yes for 2023. With that said, you may recall that I typically ask the Lord if there is a word or words for us for a new year. I felt the Lord drop four words into my spirit for us concerning 2023. Each of these four words will require a yes from us.

The first word I felt the Lord speaking to my heart was **Challenge**. I know the last three years have been nothing but a challenge. I know 2022 has been rough on some of you and I hate to be the one to tell you this on the first day of this bright new year, but life in 2023 will not go unchallenged or unopposed. I'm not suggesting it's going to be a bad year. I believe there is a new season of blessing coming, but that season and that blessing won't come to us unchallenged. Remember we have a spiritual opponent that wages war against us. Remember we live in a fallen world where bad things still happen to good people. Justice is longed for but often denied. We do dumb things that produce negative consequences and outcomes we have to then deal with, consequences that challenge us and try to defeat us. Challenges can come from many directions and 2023 will be no different, but let me tell you something you need to remember: **Challenge is a means and mechanism to growth.**

I want you to change the way you view the challenges you are facing. Challenges don't have to defeat you. Depending on your response, they can be a means to growth. Don't surrender so fast. Don't give in so quickly. That challenge isn't there to destroy you, instead, depending on your response, it can prove to be the mechanism by which you overcome and succeed.

The writer of Hebrews talks about the Lord's discipline. **"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves...God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it**

produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Hebrews 12:5-6, 10-11

We think of discipline as punishment, but think of it as a means of discipleship. Read it as “He disciplines those he loves.” What if we introduce the idea of challenge into the equation? He disciplines, disciples, challenges those he loves. He challenges us to right living, right choices. He allows challenges to come as a mechanism to produce growth, challenges that prompt us to pursue the things of God, to overcome obstacles and lay hold of what is truly valuable and important in life. He challenges us to embrace the very life of God.

The best teachers challenge their students. They challenge us to learn, to think, to examine, to question, to go beyond, to expand our horizons and our reach, to dream of what can be, of what we can accomplish. The best coaches challenge us, to think bigger, better, to train harder, to be disciplined so we can compete and win. They challenge us to sacrifice the immediate for a greater good, a greater goal and purpose. What I’m suggesting is that God may permit challenges or use the challenges that come in your life in 2023, not to harm you or destroy you, but to mature you, to provoke you to greater effort, to excel, to get a new mindset a new perspective.

Challenges will come in 2023, but say yes to Jesus and recognize in those challenges are opportunities to grow in your faith, opportunities to deepen your relationship with God, to discover new giftings, new purpose, new ways to serve God and others, new ways to shake off shackles and be free. In those challenges you’ll find miracles, new mercy, new evidence of God’s faithfulness. The bible tells us Job faced challenges that were undeserved and overwhelming, but in the challenges he said Yes to God. Job declared, “though God slay me yet I will trust him” and in the end, Job was blessed to see and know the Lord as never before. At the end of his time of testing Job said to the Lord, “**My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.**” **Job 42:5** The challenges brought new discovery, a greater revelation of God and Job was blessed so that the latter part of his life was greater than the first. Say yes to Jesus, even in the challenges of 2023 because God is working all things for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose.

The second word the Lord dropped in my heart is **Change**. Change is inevitable. We keep wondering if things will ever get back to normal but I think we moved past that some time ago. The train already pulled out of the station on that. As we often say, **Change is here to stay.**

Like challenges, we may need a new perspective on change, to look at it from a different point of view.

Change comes with life. It is part of the growth cycle of life. Seasons change, there is sowing and reaping, seed time and harvest, a time to be born and a time to die. We had baby dedications and funerals in 2022 and we will have the same in 2023. People will come and people will go. It's inevitable. It's life. Deciding means change. Movement means change. If we keep moving, keep living, change will come. To remain unchanged, unmoved is to atrophy, to wither, to die. Our prayer needs to be "God help us and don't allow us as a church to fear change so much that we will wither and die. Instead, keep us moving forward into all you have for us" and if God answers that prayer, it will mean change! But it will also mean blessing and new opportunities to grow and reach our community and our world.

If Jesus doesn't come in the next twelve months there will be new seasons for Carbondale in 2023. New semesters. I remember as a kid dreading every new school year. I mean I was physically sick thinking about it. I hated school. A new school year meant change, it meant new teachers and new classes and every year some kid a grade ahead of you told you horror stories of what happens to kids in that class. "And in fifth grade they make you..." Oh Lord, help me. I can't survive fifth grade!" "Seventh graders have to..." "Stop, you're killing me. I can't. Mom, can I be homeschooled?" That was me as a kid. I hated change.

Here is the thing. Do you believe that God sees you and sees the way you are going and He sees the way you should go? Then if he calls you to change, if he asks you to make changes and adjustments in your life, can you trust him that he knows best for you? Can you trust him that his plans and purposes are for your good? If so, then say yes to him and obey! The challenges you face and the changes you experience; take a deep breath, breathe, relax and trust that he will work all of that for your good. Say yes to Jesus in 2023! Say yes to the changes he asks of you! He is asking you to change because it is for your best. He asks you to obey because it will bring blessing, it will provide protection.

Is the Lord asking you to make changes, to accept some changes for 2023? Maybe a change in direction? Change in priorities perhaps? Make the change and align yourself with God's plan, God's word, God's purpose for your life, your family. Align yourself with God's timing. Say yes and surrender all to Jesus. Say yes to the changes because God knows the future,

he knows where he needs you to be, he knows where you need to be, better than you do. Trust him with the changes and say yes.

The third word is **Calling**. For some of you, changes will come in 2023 as the result of saying yes to a calling from the Lord. God may be calling you to step out in faith, to say yes to a new direction, yes to a new area of ministry, yes to a new way to serve the Lord, yes to volunteering at church or in the community, yes to being a foster parent or to adoption, yes to going back to school, yes to a new career, yes to a call to preach, to pastor, to get involved in missions, yes to being a missionary in your school, yes to being a career missionary, yes to being a leader, an influencer to lead people to Jesus, yes to being an evangelist, a worship leader, helping to work with children and youth or with the little ones in the Ark Park. I don't know what the calling may look like, but I believe God is calling people and will be calling people in 2023. The question is, **Will you step up and say "Yes" to His call?**

Maybe it's a call to faithfulness. Some of you need to answer the call from the Lord to commit to being faithful in church attendance if you are able. Faithful in online attendance if you can't be here. Faithful in tithing and giving to missions and supporting the work and ministries of this church. I woke up one morning last week with the Lord speaking to my heart about increased generosity, radical generosity. That's another word for us. Increasing our generosity in serving, in giving, in caring for others, in loving and helping, generous with our time and talent for the Lord and for others. What is he calling you to in 2023? Whatever it is, opt for radical generosity and say Yes!

Calling also suggests that we are cultivating a listening ear, a greater or heightened sensitivity to the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. If indeed the Holy Spirit is calling in 2023, we need to make sure we are listening. We may need to find ways to quiet our life, our mind and spirit, to tune other voices and noises out and intentionally take time to just listen to Jesus. Ask the Lord, "Is there something you want me to hear? Is there something you want to say? I'm listening. I'm all ears." Jesus is calling by His Holy Spirit. Listen and then answer his call with yes!

The fourth and final word is **Commitment**. We tie it all up with that word. Whatever the challenges, whatever the changes that may come in 2023, whatever the calling and wherever the calling takes us in our obedience, the bottom line is we must face it all and embrace it all with commitment to Jesus. I'm committed to serving him, living for him, saying yes to Him! This is

how we make 2023 a successful year. This is how we grow and experience his blessings, by committing ourselves to him and saying Yes to him, yes to whatever he asks.

For this new year, are you willing to commit your life to the Lord? Are you willing to make his priorities your priorities? Willing to commit to making your spiritual life and spiritual growth a priority? Willing to commit to pray, to read and study God's word, to attend church, to be a worshiper, to walk in obedience to God as a committed follower of Christ?

If you are a parent, will you commit to making the faith development of your children and their relationship with Jesus the top priority. Say yes to raising godly world changers in your household. The best way you can do that is for you, mom and dad, to say yes to modeling the life of a committed Christ follower for your children. Make this a priority.

I can't tell you what commitment should look like for you. My role and purpose this morning is simply to call you to that next place or level of commitment as we enter a new year. My assignment was to encourage you to face challenges and changes and the callings of 2023 with a committed "yes" to Jesus. **Challenge. Change. Calling. Commitment.**

We are going to celebrate communion this morning. As we do, on the first day of the new year, we are proclaiming that Jesus alone is the source of life and hope and peace for us. Our very life is found in him and is from him and we are committed to him. It's more than just a commitment, it is a covenant, signed and sealed in his blood, that he belongs to us and we belong to him. Communion is a sign of that covenant. He gave himself for us and now we give ourselves to him. Every moment of 2023, we belong to him. Every moment of 2023, we say Yes to Him!

Lord we pledge ourselves to you. We commit everything to you, every aspect of our lives, every moment of 2023, may we say yes to you and live in obedience to you and your word. May we live in covenant with you, in this covenant of grace, signed in your own blood and as we take communion together today, we acknowledge and affirm that all of our hope, our life, our future is in you. We look to you, for your blessing, your help, your grace in this new year. Thank you for keeping us under your mercy and for giving yourself for us and for our salvation.