

Experiencing God - Blessings Through Obedience

Luke 6: 46-49; 19: 28-44

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Do you ever wonder why He did it?

What propelled Jesus forward through the events that we read about this morning? What led him to secure that donkey and follow the parade route, fulfilling all kinds of ancient prophecies, and sending out all kinds of signals that would have been understood in his culture - signals that he was coming as a King of peace....

.... what made him do that?

What made him sit all along the parade route, surrounded by all those fickle people - people that he KNEW would turn against him and demand his torture and execution within a week?

What made him so resolute in the face of the Pharisee opposition, as they demanded that he stop the entire thing?

The answer is found in one simple word.

In the face of all that opposition, and in the face of his looming death, and even while all alone in the midst of the crowd, Jesus went forward with this act-

- coming out of seclusion and heading right into the heart of enemy territory
- he did all of this because of one simple word:

OBEDIENCE

He did it because it was his heavenly father's will that this occur.

He went forward because that was the goal that God has set for him.

He completed it because this was his divinely appointed task.

He did it because,

- in his relationship with His heavenly father
- he could do no other.

Following through on a commitment made

on a plan set

on a path begun

- it could be no other way.

We're at the end of a seven-part series, dealing with some basic truths of Christian living. We've been talking about them in the context of our experience of God - a real, tangible experience. What is that like, and how does it work?

1. So, in week one we learned that God is always at work around you. He didn't just wind up the universe and wander off on vacation. With love and intention and care - He is at work all around us.

2. That work, we said in week two, comes in the context of God's great love for us, and his desire to have a relationship with us - a real, personal relationship.

3. It is also a work that He invites us to be part of.

4. And, as He is going about His work, and inviting us to be part of it, He will direct and guide and speak into our lives in various ways.

5. As he comes alongside us, it calls for us to make decisions.
The one thing that simply doesn't work is to remain forever ambivalent about our relationship to God. He will challenge, poke, prod and move us along the road to commitment.

6. As God is busy at work around us, and as he calls us, loves us, speaks to us, and challenges us...

...More often than not things will have to change in our lives.

Things simply don't stay the same.

We have to make sometimes major life adjustments.

Today the final point, number 7 -

7. God is known by us, experientially, as we **obey** Him.

God is at work.

He's committed to us in a love relationship.

He's keen to have us alongside Him in that work.

He will provide us all kinds of guidance.

He wants us to be committed.

He will shift things around on us sometimes.

All those things are true.

But at the end of the day it comes down to a very basic, grind it out kind of thing:

OBEDIENCE.

Not very flashy.

Not terribly mystical.

But none the less - there is remains:

obedience.

When God calls us into a certain direction,
When God makes clear his will for our lives,
When God speaks -

Not only are we to **listen** to His Word

We're also called to **do it**.

Anything less is foolish.

It is folly of the highest order to think that you can be in a great space with God

That you can have a sound, deep relationship with him

one that is alive and fruitful and lasting

That all is well with your soul

That the Holy Spirit smiles and is delighted to be within you
It is folly of the highest order to think that you can be in a great space with God
When you are not living in **obedience** to His clear will.

Jesus remained in the will and the love and the peace of the Father.
And so He continued the path of obedience,

no

matter

what!

We are called to follow.

It's that simple.

Jesus had to walk a path that led through a parade route.

Ours may be a much quieter path - but we, too, are called to walk it.

Obedience -at the end of the day, it is critical to experiencing a full measure of the presence of God in a way that is real, lasting, peaceful and true.

The dynamic relationship between obedience and Christian fullness is reflected in our weekly Christian worship.

Christian worship is set up as a dialogue. It is a two way exchange between the Lord and His people - not just a one-way show. Both are involved. There is give and take, back and forth. God speaks, and His people respond - that's the dialogue of worship. And then God speaks again - and we, in the acts of liturgy, respond again. And so the rhythm continues until the final "amen" and we are out the door to live a week of worship.

The worship of our daily life.

And in that daily life worship the dialogue continues! In daily life God takes the initiative. He comes to us. He speaks to us. He works first in our lives. And then He invites us to respond.

And He waits.

Hear that - for it is key.

God calls, **and then He waits for our response to His invitation.**

There will be no further work in our lives - no blessing, no experience, no fulfilment - apart from our response. Living with God is not a one way experience, where He does all the giving and we do all the taking.

Just doesn't work that way.

He looks to our response. Because our actions will speak louder than any of our words about how much we really love Him.

What we do:

- reveals what we believe about God
- Determines how God will respond to us, and what work of His we will experience.
- determines whether we will be able to experience Him in greater intimacy or remain at an experiential distance from Him; feel remote and detached from Him.

He calls.

We obey.

He responds with affirmation... and calls us the next step forward.

Where we have to decide if we'll obey or not...

If we are faithful with the first little morsels and tender simple calls to obedience and experience that the Lord presents to us, we will receive more.

God calls us to crawl in obedience before walking before running.

We are given milk from the Lord to drink before the solid, rich food from His heavenly banquet table.

But if we ignore them, we will receive nothing further.

It's what was taught long ago, already in the Old Testament:

"If you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth... The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand...

"If you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God,... the Lord will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke..." (Deut 28:1,8,15)

If you want a vibrant, real, experience-filled, dynamic, fulfilling experience of God in your life,

begin by living in obedience to those first small things that you know to be true about God, and that you know He will want from your life.

Don't worry about more.

Begin with nailing down the first lesson. And only then, start looking for lesson # 2. Which the Lord will bring quick enough, when He determines that you are ready.

You may want to be able to do very big things for God right now.

Worry first about the basic things, the little things, the obvious things.

Keep your ears open, your heart receptive and your life pure.

Make sure that you are responding as obediently as you can to what God is putting in front of you for THIS MOMENT, without getting too hot and bothered about tomorrow.

Respond to what God reveals to you TODAY.

Do what God wills from you NOW.

It's like learning to scuba dive. They're not going to strap a tank on your back and drop you immediately 150 feet down into the bottom of some beautiful Lake Ontario ship wreck to enjoy.

You begin in a shallow pool.

Not even *in* a pool. You sit on the side of the pool and learn how the equipment works. Then how to strap it on. Then how to breathe properly. Then into the water near the side.... and on it goes.

One day, as you move forward correctly, lesson after lesson,
then one day you WILL find yourself swimming around that beautiful submarine environment.

Obedience - it's what drove Jesus along his Palm Sunday route.
And because of that obedience He now sits in glory beside the Father in Heaven.

And be aware of this -

Don't expect that obedience is free, that it will come without cost. It may cost you time. It may cost you reputation. You may have to give up pleasurable experiences. It may mean that acceptance with others is put at risk. It may even cause real pain for a while.

But don't be deterred - keep at it, keep going forward in obedience to the Lord and His revealed direction for your life.

Listen to these words of Scripture:

NLT Hebrews 12:1 Therefore... let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.

2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. Now he is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven.

3 Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don't become weary and give up.

4 After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

Jesus did.

He **did** give up His life.

That's what this whole week which we are entering is all about -
Easter week.

As we remember the suffering and death
and **then** - after that difficult, costly obedience
the Resurrection of our Lord.

Run with endurance -

- the endurance of obedience -
the race that is before you.

And keep Jesus, with His obedience, as your inspiration.

Indeed, may our desire be that of the Psalmist, who wrote:

*Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes;
And I shall keep it to the end.
Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law;
Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.
Make me walk in the path of Your commandments,
For I delight in it. (Ps 119:33-35)*

For,

as we practice that,
the blessings will follow.
the relationship will grow richer,
and the peace in our hearts ever deeper.

We will discover deeper, better layers of the Christian life than we had ever expected could be possible.

Dear God,

We want to experience You. We want to see You working through our lives.
We know that this means you may call us to moments of decision, you may bring us to places of change. And you WILL call us to obedience.

Lord, we are ready to follow you.

Jesus, as you set your face towards Jerusalem, and went forward with determination to do that which you KNEW the Father had for you to do, so we will leave here with our faces set towards obedience.

Work through us to accomplish all that you desire to accomplish.

Do not let us give in to unpromising circumstances.

Show us where we have been disobedient, that we may repent.

Build within us a trust that you are always doing what is best for us.

Give us patience to let you prepare us for the task that you have assigned to us.

Place your Spirit in our lives to direct us according to Your ways, Your purposes, and

Your work.

Make our love relationship with you even more intimate than it is already.

Thank you, dear Lord, for sticking with us - so close, so dear.

We love you.

Amen.