

“OBEDIENCE IN LOVE”  
Psalm 30, Acts 9:1-20, John 21:1-19  
April 30 & May 1, 2022

“A while back I read a story of a visiting pastor who attended a men’s breakfast in the middle of a rural farming area of the country. The group had asked an older farmer, decked out in bib overalls, to say grace for the morning breakfast.

“Lord, I hate buttermilk,” the farmer began. The visiting pastor opened one eye to glance at the farmer and wonder where this was going. The farmer loudly proclaimed, ‘Lord, I hate lard.’ Now the pastor was growing concerned. Without missing a beat, the farmer continued, ‘And Lord, you know I don’t much care for raw white flour.’ The pastor once again opened an eye to glance around the room and saw that he wasn’t the only one to feel uncomfortable.

“Then the farmer added, ‘But Lord, when we mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm fresh biscuits. **So Lord, when things come up that we don’t like, when life gets hard, when we don’t understand what you’re saying to us, help us to just relax and wait until you are done **mixing**.** It will probably be even better than biscuits. Amen’

“With that prayer there is great wisdom for all when it comes to complicated situations like we are experiencing in the world today...Our Lord is mixing several things that we don’t really care for, but something even better is going to come when He is done with it.”<sup>1</sup>

My, isn’t that true for each one of us? We can go throughout our lives easily it seems, and then all of a sudden we have all kinds of unusual things happen to us. Something in our health goes wrong; something in our family goes up-side-down; our finance are suddenly challenged; demands at the job suddenly increase dramatically; a nation goes to war with one of its neighbors; political unrest and uncertainty develops; the car breaks down; hopes and dreams don’t materialize like we want; and then we’re asked by God to do something extraordinarily strange.

Taken individually these could be very distasteful, even “hateful” things, but when we look at

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<sup>1</sup> (Source unknown)

them all together, we see God's great wisdom in it all. It turns out to be something that we could never have done on our own or even conceived in our minds. Yet **when we wait through the heat of all of these things together, when we faithfully trust in the Lord our God in the middle of all these distasteful events, we see that the end result is glorious.**

We see that in our Old Testament lesson of Psalm 30. David looks at all that is going on around him and yet he exalts the Lord because He *"lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. O Lord my God, I called to You for help and You healed me. O Lord, you brought me up from the grave; You spared me from going down into the pit"* (30:1-3). The desperate situations in his life were turned around as David trusted in the Lord through it all. And at the end of all of those troubles, he tells the Lord, *"You turned my wailing into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give You thanks forever"* (30:11-12).

**Though we may not understand all that is going on in our life right now, as we continue to obey the Lord's commands and follow Jesus' teachings, after everything gets all mixed up and we experience the heat of the fires around us, we will find the joy of the Lord.** When our love for the Lord keeps us on that straight and narrow road that Jesus has already walked, we will find God's favor and experience His great abundance in ways that delight our souls.

In the New Testament account today of Acts 9, we read of Saul and Ananias. As Saul was persecuting the church with *"murderous threats against the Lord's disciples, he went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belongs to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem"* (9:1-2). This put great fear into the hearts and minds of Christians. Yet they remained faithful, many even unto death, and they were able to see the glory of the Lord in the midst of it. Their examples of faith changed others who saw the things that they endured, enabling many others to see the value of having Christ Jesus as their own Lord and Savior, thereby spreading the Good News of the Gospel.

So as this great persecution of the saints was going on, God was working to bring about something marvelous. **Jesus encountered Saul while he was headed to Damascus, stopped him in his tracks, knocked him to his knees and then called him into service.** That's not what Saul had in mind to have happen at all. He thought he was doing the Lord's will by trying to put an end to this religious sect, and the chief priest and Pharisees and Sadducees were delighted that Saul would do the work to eliminate the followers of Jesus.

But God was already mixing things up to create something wonderful. God reached out to a disciple of Jesus named Ananias, telling him to go to work for Him, by converting Saul's life from a persecutor of the church to a presenter of Jesus Christ. God had chosen Saul to become a champion of Christianity to the whole world, to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles.

Now, this was tough for Ananias. He had heard about the activities of Saul. He knew that as a follower of Jesus, he could be arrested and taken to Jerusalem as a part of this inquisition instigated by Saul. **It was a dangerous thing that God was asking of Ananias to do, yet because he loved the Lord Jesus and desired to please Him in all that he did, Ananias obeyed this call of God and went to Saul.** It wasn't without concern and questioning the Lord about it. The Lord commanded him to "Go!" and he obeyed (Acts 9:15).

You see, Ananias didn't know the transformation that was taking place in Saul's life. He had not yet heard about his encounter with Jesus on his way to Damascus. He had only heard about the destructive things that Saul was doing. Yet he was open to follow the Lord's leading to do His work, even if it meant going into the mouth of the lion, so to speak, in order to complete the work that the Lord was doing. Because of his love of the Lord, Ananias put his fears aside and trusted in the Lord to do a great work.

And that's just what God did. **God used Ananias to bring sight back to Saul, and as the light of Christ enters into him, his mind is changed from oppressing the followers of Jesus to advocating the love of God through Jesus Christ.**

Similar things are happening today, too. Josh Newell, Executive Director of Jesus Film Project, tells this marvelous account. He says, “A woman in Africa was poised to become a suicide bomber, to blow herself up in a local market. I will call her Carla. Before she could do the deed, Carla had a profound dream.

“A Man in dazzling white stood before her and said: *‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Follow me. You will preach the gospel.’*

“Shaken, Carla sought out a Christian woman who explained the good news. Carla believed and was made totally new. A few days later, she had another dream in which the Man told her: *‘Carla, go and share this good news with the regional commander.’* That commander was greatly feared and happened to lead one of the most radical groups in the area, responsible for the deaths of thousands.

“Before she went to his well-guarded camp, Carla kept hearing from those around her say, *‘You are crazy. Don’t go. You’ll never make it. They will kill you.’* Miraculously, she made it through every armed checkpoint, alive. Then the commander strangely granted her an audience.

“Keenly aware that with just a word the commander could end her life, Carla spoke: *‘Jesus wants you to know that He is the way, the truth, and the life.’* Rather than kill her, the commander went to a table in his office, sat down and began to weep.

“Sitting at his desk, this man who was greatly feared just wept. He told Carla: *‘Three days ago, Jesus appeared to me in a dream. He told me that I was on a path of destruction. I must change my ways. If I don’t, I will be destroyed. Then he told me that a woman was going to come and tell me about the gospel!’*

“Carla did, as best she could. He believed and they prayed! Made totally new in Christ, he then gave orders for all his officers to come to the camp, three truck loads came. When they arrived, he told them the truth, that Jesus was the true and living God. Carla coordinated with Jesus Film staff in the country who sent in video tablets containing the “JESUS” film in the local language so the fighters could fully see, hear, and understand the gospel.

“Every night since, these radicals have been watching “JESUS” in their heart language. At last count, nearly 1,000 people have given their lives to Christ and renounced terror.

“And yet, God is doing far more. The best part is that, under the commander’s influence, the doors have swung wide open to share the gospel with tens of thousands in this otherwise dangerous area. Staff leaders are saying there is a movement of evangelism unfolding that is ‘*beyond belief - with skyrocketing opportunities...*’

“New believers are asking if they can be equipped with video tablets so they can fan out and share the good news with their families and many others. They want them to see, hear, and understand the gospel, to also be delivered from spiritual darkness into His transforming light.” Sounds just like God is making an old event into a brand new one, using similar situations and conditions.

That’s the kind of stuff God can do when we obediently follow Him in love. **God used Ananias to bring sight back to Saul, and as the light of Christ enters into him, his mind is changed from oppressing the followers of Jesus to advocating the love of God through Jesus Christ.**

Let Him use even you to transform the lives of those around you, even if they’ve hurt you, even if they’ve spitefully misused you, even if they had only destructive things in mind for you, pray for them, seek God’s direction for you to intercede in their lives and watch what God can do. Obedience in love is a vital part of the transformation of the world.

Let me give you one more example of obedience in love from the lives of the disciples. Listen to John 21:1-19. (READ John 21:1-19)

How many of you have taken the advice of someone on the shore to fish in a different spot, or use a different technique? No? These guys were professional fishermen. They knew how to fish, but having spent a whole night out on the waters of the Sea of Galilee without catching anything, they’re willing to try anything.

Fishermen would normally put their nets out of a boat on the left side so that their strong armed right hand would be able to haul in the net, hopefully with fish. But nothing was working that night.

The disciples must have thought they had lost their touch, since they hadn't fished since Jesus had called them into ministry 3½ years earlier. So when the stranger on the shore suggests an alternate style of fishing, from the right side of the boat, they don't spin the boat around, they just throw out the nets with their weak arms. They hadn't caught anything up to that point, so why not try something new. So they obeyed the advice and the haul was beyond their belief. They can't even pull the net into the boat, there are so many fish.

It's at that point that John recognizes that this was not the first time something strange like this had happened. He remembered the first time was when Jesus was with them and they had also caught enough for two boats to be so loaded with fish that they were having problems staying afloat. John leans over to Peter and says, "It is the Lord!" And it suddenly clicks in Peter's head, too, that It has to be Jesus. The simple act of obedience brought in a tremendous catch.

Peter is so excited to see Jesus again that he doesn't wait for the boat to get there. He dives in and goes to shore. By then, Jesus has a fire going with a charcoal fire and fish and bread on it, right ready for breakfast. I'd say that it was heavenly bass with pumpernickel. Maybe not. Anyway, when the others finally arrive, Peter grabs the net and pulls in the catch so that they can have more fish to eat. And they sit down to an early morning picnic by the sea.

It is there that Jesus restores Peter to Himself as not only a disciple, but now an evangelist. Three times Peter had denied Jesus; now, three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, each time probing a little deeper into Peter's will. Would Peter genuinely love Jesus with all his heart, giving up all else to follow Him? **Peter confirms that he will be a disciple with all of his heart.** Would Peter give himself to love Jesus with all of his mind and soul, resolving to know nothing else but the things of the Lord? **Peter decides that his whole life, from then on, would be lived for the Lord in all of his ways.** Would Peter then be willing to give up his entire strength to do the work of the Lord Jesus, even to his own death? **Peter resigns himself to serve Jesus Christ as His Lord with every ounce of his life, obedient in love to the last moment of his life.** It is the call of Jesus in Peter to become not only the

shepherd of the sheep, but the full guardian of those who would follow Jesus Christ.

The first question of Jesus comes to each one of us. Do we love Jesus more than these? **Will we let Jesus become first place in our hearts so that nothing else takes precedence over Him?** Will we be willing to submit control of our lives to Jesus so that we may follow Him in all we do and say? Our words and actions proceed out of the heart of us, so Jesus asks if we will allow Him to so rule in our hearts that everything we say and do demonstrates our love for Him. Will we give ourselves completely over to Jesus?

The second question of Jesus follows: **Will we let Jesus rule our everyday lives such that we are open to let Him lead us to do His work?** Will we give our minds and souls to not only know Jesus, but live Jesus each day of our life so that others might see Him through us? Can we resolve to give everything over to Jesus so that all we have and all that we are can be used for His service to help others come to know Him, too?

The third question then comes as no surprise: **Are we willing to give our whole life to the service of the Lord Jesus so that where He sends, we will go, and what He says, we will do?** Will we be willing to love Jesus enough that our whole being lives for Him? Will we give even our own bodies to Jesus to let Him guide us by His Holy Spirit in order to complete the work of Jesus for the Salvation of the whole world?

Each question probes deeper and deeper into our own will to the point of calling us to become completely sold out for Jesus. Each question invites us to be so committed to following Jesus that every event, every situation, every trouble, every joy and every day is open to let God use us to follow Jesus in such a way, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to magnify the Lord as we take the Good News into our world.

So can you be a teacher for the Lord, touching the lives of your students for the love of Jesus? Will you be a coach for the Lord Jesus, setting an example on the court or field or pool or track of a life devoted to Him? Will you be a designer for the Lord Jesus, building and constructing things that glorify

Him? Will you be a county supervisor for the Lord Jesus so that every decision you make is based upon the guidance of the Lord? Will you be a book-keeper for the Lord Jesus, guiding the financial resources under your oversight to glorify the work of the Lord? **Will you work with people for the Lord Jesus so that they not only find their physical needs met, but find their spiritual needs met, too?** Will you be a repairman for the Lord Jesus, repairing not only equipment, but the relationships those around you have for the grace of the Lord? Will you sing praises for the Lord Jesus? Will you sell houses for the Lord Jesus? Will you serve meals for the Lord Jesus? Will you illustrate for the Lord Jesus? Will you cook and clean and administer and manage and stock shelves and sell cars and paint and build and work in all that you do so that others might see the Lord Jesus in you and through you? Will you be willing to even die for the Lord Jesus, giving your last breath and ounce of strength to promote His ways for others to come to know Him?

**You see, that's what obedience in love calls us to do. Everything we do is to be done for the Lord Jesus.** Everything we say is to bring glory to Him. Our whole life is to be lived in such a way that those we have been given to shepherd might not only find life, but eternal life through Jesus. We are to guide them, nurture them and give them the spiritual food they need to grow into a relationship with Jesus.

I hope that you become obedient to Jesus out of your love for Him so that there is nothing that He can call you to do that you will not do, for the rest of your life. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for the things of this world that turn our hearts back to You. Thank You for calling each one of us to be Your disciples. Give us the courage to accept Your call to us, to claim Jesus as our all in all, and to begin living for Him each and every day of our life, every minute of our day. There are so many who need to hear about Jesus so that they might come to follow Him. Give us the heart, the soul, the mind and the strength of Jesus so that we can be obedient to His call out of love for Him, anywhere, anytime. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

SERVICE OF COMMUNION.