

7. Obedience without fear

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Somehow many Christians in America think that being a Christian means just being a decent person. They think that being a law abiding citizen is good enough; they think that they can compromise with somewhat naughty things here, somewhat marginalized things there; they think that they can continue with their pet sins by ignoring what the Lord says in the Bible. If that's you, you probably are doing it, because you might have a fear that the unbelievers around think you are a Jesus freak, or you are too embarrassed to be one.

Let me make a simple illustration for you. Whenever you choose to disobey God's Word, it is the same thing to tear out the pages of the Bible and throw them away because you don't want to follow God's commands.

This morning we will look into two obedient people without fear: First, Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus; second, John the Baptist. We have a lot to cover, so let's jump right in.

A. THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Matthew 2:13-23 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." 14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more." 19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Luke 2:39 So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.

We cannot help but admire Joseph for his faithfulness in obeying God instantly without an objection and caring for both Mary and Jesus.

At the first glance of v15, we might wonder how this prophecy from Hosea 11:1 is fulfilled in Jesus. But Matthew makes it clear that even as Israel the nation came out from Egypt, so does the Son of God.

V18 quotation from Jeremiah 31:15 originally referred to the mourning of Israel's mothers during the conquest and captivity of the nation. But here, Rachel is a picture of Bethlehem's mothers. Satan was using Herod to kill Christ before He grew up.

B. JESUS' CHILDHOOD

Luke 2:40-52 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. 41 His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. 43 When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; 44 but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. 46 Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. 48 So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." 49 And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. 51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Can you imagine how Mary must have felt for losing the Messiah? How could they have lost track of their Son? In a large "caravan" during that time of the history, the women and small children went ahead and the men followed with the bigger boys. Joseph and Mary may each have thought that Jesus was with the other. For a full day they journeyed, looking for Him among the travelers before they concluded He must still be in Jerusalem.

It wasn't unusual for students to meet teachers of the Law in the temple, plying them with questions and attentively listening to their answers. What was unusual was the way Jesus was answering the teacher's questions! His youthful perceptiveness sparked several reactions from the teachers. This was their Son, going head-to-head with the brightest minds of Israel.

Jesus is a wonderful example for all young people to follow. He grew up in a balanced way without neglecting any part of life, and His priority was to do the will of His Father. He knew how to listen and how to ask the right questions. He learned how to work, and He was obedient to His parents.

Young people and those who are young at heart, listen carefully, please. While the world entices you and tries to convince you to do whatever you feel like, including going directly against what the Lord says in His Word the Bible, you have a choice. You don't have to follow this dying and corrupt world. What they offer to you may sound good for now, but it will cost you your eternal soul. Is it worth it to you? It is not.

C. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Luke 3:1-2 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of

Abilene, 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

Matthew 3:4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

John 1:6-8 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

Luke 3:3-6 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

John the Baptist was the original hippie – eating organic food and living in the wilderness and wearing strange clothes. I am sure that you could see a locust leg sticking out between John's teeth while he was preaching to the people who came to be baptized. John was not the first pope of the Southern Baptist denomination. The right title should have been John the Baptizer.

To the nation Israel that was disillusioned by its religious leaders, John offered a message of hope. John's message convicted the people's hearts and they repented. The baptism itself was not the actual process of forgiveness, rather it was their way to show their change of heart to the world.

John's responsibilities were threefold: to "clear the way" for the Lord, to "prepare the way" for the Lord, and to "get out of the way" of the Lord.

D. THE STRAIGHT TALKER FOR JESUS

Luke 3:7-14 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." 10 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" 11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." 12 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." 14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

Addressing the congregation as snakes is not a customary way to begin a sermon. But John wasn't interested in giving a nice pep talk or telling people that whatever they do is OK like many American modern day pastors do who want to be popular more than being obedient to the Lord and His Word. He was the straight talker for Jesus.

These religious people might have all the right things for their religion, but they had not repented with humble hearts before God. They believed that their heritage as Abraham's offsprings secured them favor with God, but John had bad news for them.

I must say the same thing like John to some of you today. Some of you may have religions, "I am a Methodist, I am a Baptist, I am a Catholic, or I am a Calvary Chapelite." God doesn't care. You won't find any denomination in heaven. God is not looking for someone with a religion. If that is the case, many devout Muslims, Buddhists, other religious people will enter into heaven before born-again Christians. But they will not. Why? Because they don't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Because they've never received Jesus into their hearts as the Savior and Lord.

Why did the nation Israel reject Jesus Christ? Because they did not know Him and didn't care to know Him. They were spiritually ignorant. Jesus is the "true Light" – the original of which every other light is a copy – but the Jews were content with the copies. They had Moses, the Law, the temple, and the sacrifices; but they did not comprehend that these "lights" pointed to the true Light who was the fulfillment, the completion, of the OT Laws.

Let me put this in our terms: There is no other country in the world like America which has so much spiritual advantage of Christianity. There are more Christian schools, churches, books, CDs, and Bible teachers here in the U.S. than any other nation. Then why is it that America is rejecting Jesus in every possible way?

It is because of people's choice. Not only the unbelievers of the U.S., but also even the majority of believers would rather immerse themselves into the worldly lifestyles than obey the Lord Jesus. Parenthetically, they don't want to see their sins the way God sees. They compromise the biblical standards; they justify their sins with their own self-righteousness; and they blatantly ignore God's commandments from the Bible. Then they wonder why the churches in American don't have power against satan's spiritual attacks.

E. THE VOICE, NOT THE WORD OF GOD

John 1:15-28 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" 16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. 19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said." 24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. 25 And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. 27 It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." 28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John the Baptist was actually born six months before Jesus according to Luke 1. So in this statement he is referring to our Lord's preexistence, not His birth date. Jesus existed before John the Baptist was ever conceived.

John the Baptist understood who he was in God, a servant of God. He also understood that the Lord Jesus is supreme and he was obedient to Him. Here is my question to you and myself: Is Jesus supreme in our lives? We claim to be followers of Christ. Does He get treated as the Master of your life each and every day by you or does He get left over like a slave? No one can answer that, except you. And Father God in heaven knows everything about you, the way you think, and how you prioritize Him in your life.

John denied being either Elijah or the Messiah. John had nothing to say about himself because he was sent to talk about Jesus. Jesus is the Word; John was nothing but "a voice". John pointed back to the prophecy by Isaiah and affirmed that he was the fulfillment for Christ.

Isaiah 40:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.

John the Baptist was not the least bit concerned about his own reputation, nor glory. The only thing he had in his heart was pointing people to the Messiah Jesus. With that statement in mind, I have a serious question to ask you guys: Do you witness to your family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers as the Holy Spirit leads? I am not talking about preaching to them about Jesus. Just simply giving your own testimony and what the Lord has done in your life in conversation with them. If you are not doing it, why not? What are you afraid of? Remember, it is the Lord's commandment to ALL OF US, not just a selected few.

F. QUESTION

Are you obedient without fear enough to be a voice of God that declares the truth of Jesus to others or are you going to be disobedient?