



# 2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Feb 28<sup>th</sup> - Mar 6<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: February 27<sup>th</sup>



February 28

**Proverbs 14:12**

Yesterday, I attempted to make sure that I framed our discussion in the right context. When talking on the subject of obedience, it is imperative to ensure that we understand the situation in which obedience is to occur. Sometimes, we face a decision that requires biblical wisdom. Biblical wisdom is the discipline of rightly discerning the situation and then making the decision that most closely aligns with biblical teaching at a given moment.

These are situations in which there is no "thus says the Lord" type of decree, instead we are left to pray, seek counsel and apply biblical principles to our decision. Things like where to go to college, what job to take, when to retire, how much money to save and the like are in this category. No verse is going to tell you to go to Virginia Tech (or UVA for all you Hoos out there) but that doesn't mean that we can't think in biblical terms (is there biblical community there? Do these degrees help further the gifts God has given me? Can I glorify God while present?).

Nevertheless, the topic of the sermon Sunday was about obedience when God clearly speaks. In our text, God audibly reveals to Peter His desire for Peter's life, and this provided the ground of Peter's obedience (see Acts 10:29). The truth is that the Bible speaks to many subjects... specifically. Sometimes the Word that is given makes sense to us, but other times it doesn't seem wise, prudent or even realistic!

Peter finds himself in a situation in which God's clear Word does not make any sense to him and yet he chooses to obey God anyway. This is a declaration of faith and also an action that is motivated by the understanding that God far transcends Peter in His wisdom and authority. While the way didn't seem right to Peter, the Way maker had Peter's trust.

Today's lesson affirms that sometimes the way that seems right to us (i.e., the decision that is being made) might appear to be different than how we are instructed by God. It might seem like a decision is reasonable and appealing in our flesh, but the way that seems right leads to destruction!

At the end of the day, our obedience is grounded in a proper knowledge both of who we are (limited, sinful beings) and who God is (omnipotent, omniscient and righteous). While things might "seem" right to us, we can know that the things that God has commanded of us ARE right in all circumstances according to His wisdom.



March 1

**Genesis 16:1-3**

Over the next two days, we are going to examine two biblical accounts of those who heard the Word of God and responded. Tomorrow, we will see the great reward of heeding God's explicit instructions even if they seem bizarre but today, we are going to see the consequences of doing what seems expedient in contradiction to God's Word on a subject.

The context of our passage matters immensely here. Remember, God has promised Abraham and Sarah that He will provide an offspring through them (a very important key). He promised numerous descendants and was explicit that He would work a miracle to see it come to fruition.

This seems bizarre to the world. Our human sensibilities don't react well to such an idea. After all, who has a child in their senior adult years? It's just not "plausible" and certainly becomes less and less likely as the days pass.

While Abraham and Sarah held out hope for a while, at some point they decided that they would need to take matters into their own hands if God's promise to them would be fulfilled. This is a dangerous place to be as individuals. While their heart may have been partially in the right place, their actions confessed a lack of faith and a subversion of God's authority as well.

The idea was formulated that the "sensible" thing to do would be to bring forth a descendant through more natural, typical and predictable methods. This is what Sarah proposes in our text for the day. Essentially, Abraham and Sarah are devising a way to do the Lord's work in their own wisdom and through their own means. Instead of simply listening to God and obeying His command to wait and believe, they did what they thought was best.

The result was disastrous... and it always is! The product of the relationship became a thorn in the side of God's people, and we are still dealing with the ramifications of that transgression today. The lesson then is a simple one, we are not responsible for doing what seems right or expedient, we are responsible to listen to the clear Word of the Lord and obey His commands in faith that He knows more than we do and that His plan considers all of the particular objections or qualifications that we might have.

When God clearly speaks, we must listen. If we refuse to do so, we have a mountain of evidence (both biblical and experiential) that our choices will result in heartache and not triumph.

March 2

## 2 Kings 5

Yesterday's text showed the disastrous effects of refusing to listen to God's Word, even if it seems unreasonable and today's text demonstrates that those who do heed God's instructions are richly blessed.

The story of Naaman is a fascinating account to read. This man was well-respected and desperate. He had a disease that was considered ghastly and incurable which caused in him the desperation necessary to seek help from the Lord through His prophet.

The account records a rather interesting interaction between Elisha and Naaman and it even demonstrates Naaman's foolish beliefs regarding who had the "inside track" before the Father. Nevertheless, the point that we are trying to emphasize today is grounded in Naaman's eventual submission to the instructions of God through the prophet.

You can imagine that Naaman had a different idea as to how the prophet might instruct him to deal with leprosy. Perhaps there was some magic potion or an incantation or confession of faith in Israel's God that would unlock the Lord's divine and miraculous power. I'm sure that Naaman had many different scenarios playing in his mind as he arrived in Israel for healing but none of them included washing himself 7 times and in the Jordan no less!

Elisha's instructions were not sensible to Naaman. They seemed to offer no real, substantial help, after all the Jordan's water wasn't magical, was it? It would have been tempting to blow off the entire situation, but Naaman didn't.

We can speculate as to why Naaman stayed. Perhaps he was just desperate and was willing to try anything, maybe he was just impressed enough with what he had heard about Elisha that he gave it a whirl. Whatever the reason, we have an example here of the blessing of simply listening to God's instructions. Naaman didn't understand them, they didn't seem to deal with the problem and I'm sure it seemed like a waste of time, but he listened and obeyed anyway.

The result of the story is encouraging and instructive. Naaman's washing resulted in his healing. The healing came not because the Jordan was indeed magical but because the Lord worked through the odd to bring about the supernatural. The lesson from the story is profoundly important. We don't flock to the Jordan when we have incurable diseases but we should flock to the Bible for instructions from the God who is active and able to guide us in all things.



March 3

### Hebrews 5:9

Over the next four days, we are going to simply speak about the subject of obedience. I suppose my goal is to try to answer this question, "how important is obedience to the Christian life anyway?" unfortunately, I believe that there is some pretty poor teaching and theology floating around Christian circles today on the subject. We have made obedience a marvelous, but unnecessary, addition to the Christian experience but is this a biblical reality?

Today's text is as clear as we could possibly hope it to be on the subject at hand. While there are some marvelous truths in the greater context, I want to drill down on the finality and absolute nature of this declaration "he (Jesus) became a source of salvation to all who OBEY Him".

Notice how the author connects our obedience to our salvation. Only those who are obedient have real confidence that they will be saved by Christ. Now, this begs some questions, doesn't it? Some of you might wonder if this means that we are preaching a works-based salvation. Am I saying that those who obey earn their salvation? No! What the Bible is teaching here is that obedience is the necessary outcome of true, saving faith. We are saved by grace through faith, but that faith leads not just to a recognition of the Gospel message of salvation but also to a recognition of Jesus' Lordship and a heart that is geared towards honoring Him as our Authority.

Some of you might then ask, does this passage teach that Christians will never disobey? No! Surely all of us have moments, and even seasons, in life in which we are disobedient. Nevertheless, the general trajectory of our lives and the overall pattern of our day-to-day existence should be characterized by obedience.

Will we make mistakes? We absolutely will! Will there be moments of wandering? Without a doubt we will stray. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which we will always be guided back to the straight and narrow and our lives will be lived, if imperfectly, on the path of obedience to Christ.

Folks, obedience is not an option, it is a necessary and telling component of the Christian life. Those who obey are demonstrating their saving faith and the lack of obedience is a confession of a lack of faith which saves. We must realize that Christ did not save us to live in our sins, He saved us to sanctify and, ultimately, glorify us which only takes place as we live obedient lives as we understand His revealed will in the Scriptures.

The world does not need to see men and women on the sidelines of life, abstaining from their activities in order to be holy. The world needs to see the "good life", modeled by folks who have given up their fleshly passions in order to pursue a greater, more meaningful life of following Christ. This is true biblical obedience and it results in our truly being set apart from the rest of society.

March 4

**1 Peter 1:14-17**

So, we established yesterday (I hope!) that it is necessary for true believers to demonstrate their saving faith through obedience. Christ's salvation is for those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Today, I want to drill down a bit more on the way this fleshes itself out in our daily lives. What does it mean to be obedient? The answer is that obedience to God looks like holiness and holiness has two distinct components, one negative and one positive.

Our text today does a marvelous job of outlining both realities for us as we see first that holiness necessitates a split from our former, fleshly passions. Holiness is more than what we "don't do" but it isn't less than that! There is great truth in reflecting upon the reality that we are obedient, in part, by abstaining from evil deeds. The term translated "passions" is rendered "lusts" and "covetousness" in other portions of the Scripture and both of those terms help us understand what Peter has in mind here. What he is teaching is that those who are obedient are no longer characterized by the kind of carnal, fleshly, lustful pursuits that are so typical of the lost world. We demonstrate our holy obedience to the Lord by separating ourselves from the wicked and base things that permeate our society and our former individual lives.

Second, we are to pursue holiness in our "conduct". The point that Peter makes here is so incredibly important. While it is true that holiness includes our refraining from our former sinful pursuits, its also involves an active component of obedience as well. Stated simply, we obey God by ceasing to walk in former sin AND by commencing to walk in ways that reflect His demonstrated character in Christ.

The church tends to miss it here and sometimes it is drastic. When we define holiness and obedience solely by the negative (don't cuss, don't drink, don't wear that, go there, etc.) we essentially create a world in which the entire goal is to do as little as possible. This leads to despair and boredom and inevitably results in failure. The biblical picture of obedience is not simply ceasing sin, it is also taking up the activity of pursuing righteousness. This means that we replace our former, sinful passions with God-honoring and invigorating pursuits. We abstain from fellowship with the world, but we pursue fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We abstain from unholy talk, but we also replace our fleshly speech with God-honoring proclamation and encouragement. These things are demonstrated for us in Christ and when we begin to model Him, we are set apart not just by what we do not do but, even more importantly, what we pursue and how we live in this fallen world.

The world does not need to see men and women on the sidelines of life, abstaining from their activities in order to be holy. The world needs to see the "good life", modeled by folks who have given up their fleshly passions in order to pursue a greater, more invigorating life of following Christ. This is true, biblical obedience and it results in our truly being set apart from the rest of society.



March 5

**Romans 12:2**

Some of you might have read the previous two devotions and wondered, how do I know the difference? The truth is that this life is full of complicated, difficult decisions. All things aren't as obvious in this world as we would like. Satan is the master of lies and deception and he is quite adept at creating moments of conflict for us. Furthermore, it is challenging sometimes to know what obedience to God looks like in our circumstances. How do we know what to do?

The answer to that question is multi-faceted but it must begin with the admonition given by Paul in our text for the day. In this passage, the Apostle contrasts the two realities we mentioned yesterday. In one corner is conformity to the world, another way of talking about what Peter referred to as our former passions. In this Paul is referring to the kind of lifestyle that is in step with the wicked ways of this fallen planet. In the other corner, the Apostle refers to transformation. This is salvation (justification, sanctification) which is the process of Christ saving and transforming us into His image over and against the sinfulness of the world.

Paul's goal in this portion of Romans is to tell us how we pursue such a transformation. He wants us to know that we are to pursue holy obedience through the "renewal of our minds". This sounds wonderful, but how do we go about having our minds transformed? The answer is found in the very pages of Scripture.

The Bible is the primary means whereby we learn how to think and how to live. It teaches us to discern good from evil and allows us to understand what obedience looks like, even in the most difficult of circumstances. God in His mercy has not left us to try to figure out what we are to do, He has given us His Word and His Spirit to help us understand how to think which allows us to make good, God-honoring decisions, which is the ground of obedience.

Folks, I cannot stress this enough. I meet so many Christians who are not thinking "transformatively" (I know that's not a word but go with me). So many folks are conformed to the world. They may be believers, but they have never dedicated themselves to learning God's Word and so their thinking is quite worldly. Their sensibilities and feelings win the day over the revealed Word of God (sound familiar?).

This must change! God's desire and design is for us to live differently but we will only live in a set apart manner when we think about life in the way God intends. May we dedicate ourselves today to transformation and may that spur us to study and implementation of all that God reveals to us in the Bible.

March 6

**Ephesians 4:11-15**

Let me end our time together with one more possible objection you may have. I wonder if some of you read yesterday and thought, "this sounds wonderful, but I REALLY need help understanding this stuff, am I just left to my own devices?". The biblical answer to this question is a resounding "no"! While we certainly believe that the Spirit illuminates the Word of God in the hearts and minds of all believers in personal Bible study, we also believe that God in His Wisdom has given us wonderful resources in the church to help us along the way.

Today's passage teaches as such as it reminds us that God has given us pastors, teachers, and others (a theological issue we won't get into today) in order to equip us for ministry. What is most instructive to us today is how these folks are to equip the church. Notice here that Paul draws a straight line between equipping us to minister and knowledge (see v. 13). The way that you and I are equipped to faithfully minister, and by proxy to live obedient lives, is through the knowledge of the Son of God and the knowledge of the Son of God is to be taught to us by our leadership.

This means a few things, first it places great emphasis on biblically sound and faithful leadership. Churches that are not regularly hearing the Word of God are not in a position to live obedient, faithful lives. This is perhaps the greatest issue facing the American church today. So few pulpits are equipping at all and the consequence of such an abrogation of duty is ill prepared membership.

You should expect to hear the Word of God taught in your church and you should expect the Spirit of God to use His messenger to help you understand what you have heard. Our prayer at Smyrna is that you would leave often understanding a truth more thoroughly, grasping how the truth applies to your life more fully and encouraged to implement God's commands in your life more completely.

Your pastors and teachers should be able to answer questions, point you in the right direction, give godly counsel and help you make wise decisions, and you should find that your thinking is more mature and wiser as the years go by. God's design is for us to learn individually and corporately and when those two things are combined, the effect is a firmly rooted church that is established for the purpose of making disciples and glorifying God both individually and corporately.

Notice finally the effect of such a ministry. As the truth is spoken in love, the church grows up in every way into him who is the head, Christ Jesus. The church looks more like Christ, and this is Peter's admonition in 1 Peter 1 isn't it? We are enabled to live obedient lives through the Spirit as He reveals the truth of God which transforms our thoughts and God, in His mercy, has given us not only (I say that with all reverence) the Bible and the Spirit but other leaders who are equipped, called and empowered to be used of God to help us in our lives of obedience. What a might, marvelous, wise God we serve!