

CROSSROADS (EASTER 2020): CHRIST OBEYED

(Philippians 2:6-8)

4.9.20 Maundy Thursday

INTRODUCTION

To be a great servant, a person has to be willing to surrender their will, their way of doing things, for the will and ways of another. To be a great servant, a person has to be willing to do everything in their power to advance the agenda and desires of the person they are serving - to take their wishes and make them your commands.

For all His power, for all the crowds, for all the miracles, for all the profound teaching that we have come to know and love about Jesus Christ, He always knew the ultimate reason for which He had come to planet Earth; as He expressed it to His disciples during one of their numerous disagreements about which one of them was the greatest: ***"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" - Jesus Christ, Mark 10:45.***

But at one amazing moment in time, Jesus Christ taught and showed us all what being obedient is really all about. Let's look at that moment now.

TEXT

It had been over three years since Jesus of Nazareth had first come into the disciples' lives. Over that time, they had heard preaching and teaching that had been spellbinding, and they had seen miracles that they could never even begin to explain. It seemed, so they might have thought, that they were spending time in the company of arguably the greatest person who had ever lived.

But the last guy who would have ever claimed the label of "great" was Jesus Himself. In fact, He seemed to be constantly promoting a very different idea of what constituted greatness - at least in His view. As He had explained it one time: ***"[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 20:26b – 27.*** As He had gone on to say: ***"[T]hose who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 23:12,*** concluding by telling them: ***"[I]t is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest" - Jesus Christ, Luke 9:48b.***

And how did He model that for His disciples? Some forty years after the moment, the apostle Paul was still trying to fully explain it with these words (and I love how the New American Standard version expresses it): Christ Jesus, ***although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross - Paul, Philippians 2:6-8 (NASB).***

ANALYSIS

So, what did Christ's obedience look like? Let's dig a little deeper into this amazing description:

- 1) First is the phrase that Jesus "emptied Himself." The Greek word for this sentiment is KENOSIS, which means to empty something completely, with nothing left behind. Jesus literally did empty Himself, becoming totally selfless, so that the only thing left

was obedience to His Father. This means that His equality with God was not held in higher esteem than His obedience to God. This means that His rights as God's one and only Son, which would have been far beyond imagination, were emptied away, replaced by living as a human being in a primitive, sin-broken world.

- 2) Next is the phrase "bond-servant." The Greek word used there is DOULOS, meaning "servant," but signifying one "in bondage" and "one who gives up his will for the will of another." It is not mistaken to use the word "slave," for that is what Christ became to the will of His Father - He chose to be enslaved to it.
- 3) Next is the phrase "humbled Himself," in the Greek meaning to "make himself low."
- 4) And last, He made Himself low by "becoming obedient." The Greek word used here comes from a root that means to be "attentively listening," as from a superior to one beneath. It pictures submission as well as obedience - an obedience without limits.

Throughout Christ's ministry, He had gone to great lengths to make sure it was understood that He wasn't in business for Himself, in fact, far from it. He was a servant faithfully obeying a Master - His Heavenly Father. He never shied away from making that connection clear to all those around Him: As He Himself had pointed out:

- 1) *"I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me" - Jesus Christ, John 6:38.*
- 2) *"I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me" - Jesus Christ, John 5:30b.*
- 3) *"I did not speak on My own, hut the Father who sent Me commanded Me to say all that I have spoken. I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say" - Jesus Christ, John 12:49-50.*
- 4) *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work" - John 4:34.*

Christ's BOTTOM LINE? *"I love the Father and do exactly what My Father has commanded Me" - John 14:31b.* Obediently and humbly serving His Father without limits was what marked Christ during His time on earth. And now, in an upper room in Jerusalem on the Thursday evening of Holy Week, Jesus illustrated again His giving servant's heart.

As the disciples gathered to share the Passover meal with Jesus, Christ did something that no self-respecting rabbi would ever have done for His students; the apostle John gives us an eyewitness account: *[Jesus] got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him ...When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked them "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you"-John 13:4-5, 12-15.*

All the disciples' pictures of greatness and power fell apart, replaced by the image of their Master, their Rabbi, performing a servant's, even a slave's, duty- and for their benefit. It should have been them washing His feet. Instead, they were seeing a lesson of what true greatness was - a selfless gesture of humility in meeting the needs of others.

And an even greater gesture of humble service was next. Jesus began to take the elements of the Passover meal, but then He began to redefine them, reimagine them, in a way that they

had never heard before. The bread that they were going to be taking, He now said, was going to represent His body - His body given for them. And then the wine that they would be drinking - that was now going to represent His blood. But it was still being done with an eye toward service - and obedience. As Luke records it: ***[Jesus] took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you" - Luke 22:19-20.***

Do you hear the common thread running through Christ's words? My body - but given for you. My blood - poured out for you. Think about that! On the most traumatic night of His life on earth, Jesus is still focused on serving others. And what service: "What's mine is yours!" And not just His body but His very life's blood as well. Wow! All in the name and for the sake of obedience to His Father and His plan of salvation - and all for us!

APPLICATION

How can we ever summarize such love, both for us and His Father, that He would strip Himself of everything rightfully His to literally become sin, our sin, in our place. But it was His faithful obedience to His Father that allowed the plan of salvation to come into being.

So how can we respond? A few ideas:

- 1) First, and most important, if Jesus Christ is not the complete and total ruler of your life, He needs to be. He certainly wants to be; think of everything He did simply to allow us to have the opportunity for relationship with His Father through His obedience.
- 2) Second, understand that Christ's delight was in His becoming His Father's servant, even His slave, that His will be done. His greatest joy was found in His complete obedience to His Father. Jesus said as much to His disciples this very same evening: ***"If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete"* - Jesus Christ, John 15:10-11.** We are called as Christians to that same life - complete, unlimited obedience. But, as Jesus said, that's where the joy is, because that's where His Father's pleasure is.
- 3) Take some time to evaluate your life in light of the enslaved obedience that defined Christ's earthly life and His relationship with His Father. What part of me have I not allowed Christ to rule? Is every part of my life as pleasing to God as it can possibly be? What part of my life have I refused to surrender? Do you believe what Jesus said to His disciples, that joy in our Father is found in obedience to our Father?

CONCLUSION

Praise God that, even as I struggle to live in unlimited obedience to God, that Jesus completely lived in unlimited obedience. Praise God that, as I often find myself trying to figure the least amount of impact of something on me, that Jesus entrusted Himself completely to God, emptying Himself without limit so that salvation could be offered without limit.

And now we are going to take some time to share "virtually" in the same moment that the disciples shared with Christ all those years ago. Let's begin our communion service now.

[COMMUNION SERVICE]

God bless, everybody!