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The Greatest
Obedience

DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF AUSTRALIA

THE GREATEST OBEDIENCE

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" John 4:34

Look at yourself.

Look at the cross.

Try to figure out why it happened. It happened because of you. It happened because of me.

Ask yourself this question: Do I want anyone to tell me what to do? The answer is no, isn't it? This is the way we are. We don't want anyone to tell us what to do.

If I talk with someone about his job and ask him if he likes it, usually the answer is in terms of whether he is free to do what he wants in his job. If he has a tough boss, most likely he doesn't like his job. If his boss lets him do as he pleases, most likely he does like it.

We want freedom. I want to do my own thing, and you do. This is why marriages are often so rocky. Loss of freedom comes with marriage. A young woman who enjoys her work is taken by her husband to another city where he can find work but she can't. Children come and freedom vanishes.

Our personalities are this way-we don't want anyone telling us what to do ...

This is very simple, but it's very fundamental. Our natural unwillingness to do what other people want us to do appears early. A young mother is startled one day when her two-year-old refuses to obey her. She cannot believe it's happening all at once there is a clear conflict of wills. Her two-year-old is opposing her! Think of it-a two-year-old crying, stamping her feet, having a temper tantrum because the little child knows what she wants and doesn't want to be told anything else!

This has its good side. It's necessary for children to develop some independence, and it's good that they want certain things badly enough to get them. The fact that we know what we want and are determined to get what we want is the basis of achievement. There would be no achievement if people didn't want certain things very badly.

But our determination to do our own thing and go our own way also has its destructive side. Often it leads to disobedience. There are certain people we are obligated to obey, and there are certain rules we are obligated to obey. We must obey the law, but often our desire to do what we want leads us to disobey the law. Children must obey their parents, but many of them do not. Workers are obli-

gated to obey their employers, but many do not.

Most of all, we are obligated to obey God. He has revealed His will so that it's clear how we should live. We are not supposed to steal, but people steal all the time. Even governments steal from citizens. We are not supposed to kill, but people kill all the time. Pre-born children are destroyed by the millions, and the poor are left uncared for so that they go to early graves. We are not supposed to commit adultery, but adultery has never been more popular.

Take a look at yourself, and what do you see? You see the same thing I see when I look at myself: disobedience. Disobedience infects the human race like a wide spread disease. We can trace the origin of this widespread malady right back to the first sin of our first parents.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect fellowship with God and had everything they could have wanted. Yet, when God said, "Don't eat of the fruit of that tree," they said, "We will do as they did." Right there at the beginning were *God's command* and *man's disobedience*. The entire history of humankind can be written in terms of these two categories:

Disobedience. Think about it. Think

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about it a lot more than you usually do. And understand that it was disobedience that caused the cross of Calvary.

Why did Christ Jesus have to die on the cross? He had to because of our disobedience. Remember that, and you will have the key to understanding many things about our lives and about God's dealings with us. We are disobedient people. Just think about all the disobedience you meet every day. And just think about your disobedience. I dare you. Pull away the mask, rip off the camouflage, see it for what really is. You are self-centered, selfish, stubborn-you want to do what you want, and you don't want other people to tell you what to do. You don't even want God to tell you what to do. I can speak so harshly because I am just like you. Because we are the way we are-willful and disobedient-we are in great trouble.

We need Jesus as our Savior. He came to pay for our disobedience by being perfectly obedient. And His obedience involved dying on Calvary's cross. Let's examine His perfect obedience.

When we read about Christ Jesus in the Bible, we discover that His perfection was displayed most dramatically in His willingness to be obedient. Quite a number of passages in the New Testament highlight

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Jesus' absolute obedience to His Father in heaven. One that has always struck me is John 4.

After traveling for some time, Jesus and His disciples came to the Samaritan village of Sychar. They went to a well to get something to drink. Then the disciples went to buy some food, leaving Jesus alone at the well. While they were gone, Jesus talked with a woman of the village. They talked about the Messiah of Israel, and Jesus identified Himself as that Messiah. He showed her her sin, and she believed in Him. After she left to call some of her friends to come and listen to Jesus, the disciples returned with food. But to their surprise, Jesus refused any of the food. The conversation went this way:

His disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (v. 1-34).

Now this is a fairly unimpressive statement, appearing as it does in connection with a dramatic meeting between Jesus

and a woman who needed salvation. At first it seems to be out of context. The disciples must have been puzzled when Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me." They had food on their minds, and you know as well as I do that when people have food on their minds, they are usually not interested in a deep discussion. So it is necessary for us to lift this statement from the page and understand its extreme significance for Jesus and even for the cross, though the cross was nowhere in sight in Sychar, Samaria.

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me to finish his work." This was Jesus' food. With this declaration He showed that His entire being was wrapped up in obedience to His Father in heaven. For Him there was nothing else. This was His life: obedience to His Father in heaven. I believe that He was talking here about God's will as revealed in the Old Testament writings. He called doing God's will His food, and in the Old Testament the Word of God is described as food and drink. Obedience to the Word of God says the Old Testament, gives life. The prophet Ezekiel, at one point in his ministry, ate a book which was the Word of God (Ezekiel 3).

In the Old Testament we find the per-

feet will of God for our lives. Moses talked about the Word of God: "It is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it" (Deuteronomy 30:14). And he said, "They are not just idle words for you they are your life" (Deuteronomy 32:47). The Word of God which brings life was Jesus' food and drink. And so during the course of His life among us, He kept the law of God perfectly. Even when Satan met Him in a direct confrontation at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus withstood Him, countering Satan's clever temptation with words from Deuteronomy: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

What a contrast between us and Jesus! You and I are disobedient by nature. We all realize this-there's no need to recite our litany of rebellion once again. Jesus did God's will perfectly. Jesus, the Son of God, was fully obedient. In His life we see the perfect example of what happens when a person submits totally to the will of God.

But there is more to Jesus' obedience. Not only did He keep the law of God perfectly, but He also obeyed the one who sent Him by dedicating Himself totally to finishing the work that He had been given

to do. And that work involved more than keeping the law; it also involved making the payment for our disobedience.

We can understand this best when we leave Sychar and travel to another place, the Garden of Gethsemane. He went there after He had celebrated His last supper with His followers. In the garden Jesus left His disciples and went deep into the olive grove to pray to His Father in heaven. It was the night before His crucifixion; the cross loomed before Him, and He shuddered as He drew nearer to the hours of total sacrifice. The Bible (just think of this!) records His prayer to His Father in heaven. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). In Sychar Jesus had talked about finishing the work of the one who had sent Him, and in the garden He saw fully what that work would involve; it would involve drinking the "cup" to its bitter dregs.

What cup? Why the cup of God's wrath. Psalm 75 speaks of the judgment of God:

In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs (v. 8).

In Revelation 14 the cup of wrath reappears:

"If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath" (vv. 9,10).

And then there follows a horrible description of hell.

So it was that on the Mount of Olives Jesus Christ saw the full extent of what would be required of Him. He would have to bear the punishment due the human race for centuries of disobedience. And there in the garden, everything centered on the will of Jesus. What He had said in Sychar-"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" -was now subjected to the acid test. It was one thing to say this as the day drew to a close and the disciples surrounded Him with the meat and drink they had purchased; it was another thing to contemplate a descent into hell and still say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

The contrast between Jesus and us is total. Not only did He express obedience day after day during the course of His ministry, but at the very end, when He could feel the white hot heat of the wrath

of God building up and knew that He would have to plunge His person into it, His obedience to the one who had sent Him did not waver.

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul looked back in astonishment at what had happened when Jesus had obeyed His Father and had gone to Calvary's cross.

[Christ Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-even death on a cross! (2:6-8).

Yes indeed, the early church was overwhelmed by the fullness of Jesus' obedience. In the book of Hebrews we read:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal sal-

vation for all who obey him ... (5:7-9).

What a difference between people like us and Jesus Christ! We are disobedient through and through. We have trouble obeying people whom we should obey. But most of all, we have trouble obeying God. Many of us are in difficult circumstances right now because of our disobedience. Many of us are paying the price for disobedient actions of the past where we turn we see instances of disobedience. And then there is Jesus, the one person in the history of the human race who was perfectly obedient. He kept God's commands perfectly, and finally He died on the cross and received the wrath of God against the sins of humankind.

When we look at the cross and think about the crucifixion, this is what we should think about. Everything about the cross points to the obedience of Jesus. Think of the blood that He shed for example-we often associate this blood with Christ and His crucifixion. This is only natural. But the blood has no special mystical power; we are not saved by the blood; It cannot change our lives. Rather, we are saved by the obedience that the blood points to. And the cross itself has no value. It was just a piece of wood.

does us no good to use it in our churches and wear it as jewelry. It is meaningless in itself. The cross points to the obedience of Jesus.

We are saved in at least three ways through Jesus' obedience. First, His obedience is reckoned to our account. But because of our rebellion against heaven, we are in deep debt to the Lord. Second Corinthians talks about this: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21). The explanation is in verse 19: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." Jesus paid the price for our transgressions. As the prophet Isaiah expressed it:

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed (53:5).

Our disobedience has made us empty and wanting in the sight of God. When we believe in Jesus, His righteousness becomes our possession. When God looks at us, He does not see us, but He sees His perfect Son, Jesus.

Second, when we believe in Jesus, we don't have to worry anymore about

punishment. Disobedience brings punishment, doesn't it? We all know that. It does when a child disobeys his parents. And it does when people rebel against God. We are all disobedient rebels who deserve the punishment of hell. But when we believe in Jesus, Jesus bears the punishment. Once again, Isaiah 53 catches the essence of what we are talking about: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6).

Third, when we believe in Jesus Christ, He sends us His Holy Spirit so that we can begin to obey God. Those who believe in Jesus are given the ability to begin to live according to the will of the Lord. They can become obedient, to they can fight against sin and begin to serve God. And when they do that, they discover that the way of obedience to God leads to abundant life, to life everlasting.

It led to glory for Jesus Himself. Philipians 2, after describing the way Jesus humbled Himself all the way to the death of the cross, says:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and un-

der the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (9:11).

And the book of Hebrews says that those who obey Christ are saved eternally; "He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Obedience is a key idea in the Bible. Faith in God means obeying God. Disobeying God is not believing in God. Jesus obeyed God perfectly, and He was exalted to the right hand of God. When we believe in Jesus and repent of our sins and obey God, we are exalted with Jesus in glory.

So please believe in Jesus. If you don't, there is no hope for you. If you do, there is hope. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and your Savior, you will be saved from eternal death and you will live forever with Jesus in glory.

Look at yourself.

Look at the cross.

Understand that your disobedience sent Jesus to the cross, and believe that Jesus' obedience will save you. Thank God for this perfect Savior.

This message, prepared by Dr. Joel Nederhood, was heard over The Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in co-operation with the Christian Reformed Churches of America, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, and by shortwave throughout the world.

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