

Russell Kelfer

Illustrations of Obedience

517-B

Series: Obedience

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Illustrations of Obedience

We have been dealing in these last few lessons with the subject of obedience. Our definition of obedience is responding to knowledge by following instruction. In other words, doing what we are told. The purpose of this study is to decide what God expects and what God promises concerning our doing His will. We learned in previous lessons that the principles are generally found in the New Testament, and the portraits of those principles are generally found in the Old Testament. Oftentimes, the Old Testament is spiritual truth dramatized in the physical realm.

In the last lesson, we began the series on the principles of obedience. We dealt with two of them.

Principle 1- There is a relationship between knowing God and obeying God. We dealt with three basic ideas. First of all, the more we come to know Him, the more accountable we become. Secondly, the more we know Him, the more we are motivated to obey. Thirdly, the more we obey, the greater our capacity to obey. We studied Exodus 5, 1 John 2, Philippians 3 and John 15. We dealt with the principle that obedience, first of all, requires relationship. It then develops assurance. It also develops our capacity to experience power.

Principle 2- God still rewards obedience, both in this life and in the life to come. We majored on the rewards that are coming to us when we get to heaven. We studied the crowns that God has in mind for the believer. We also looked at the Bema Seat of Christ or the rewards platform in heaven where we will all appear. We dealt with three passages: II Corinthians 5:10, I Corinthians 3:10-15 and Revelations 4:10-11.

In review, the basic concepts are important to remember. All believers will appear before this awards platform in heaven. The judge will come, but not as a judge in a courtroom to pass condemnation, because:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in
Christ Jesus, (Romans 8:1a NKJV)

Illustrations of Obedience

We will no longer be condemned for our sins but rather the judge will be reviewing, as a judge in a pageant, with an eye toward giving rewards for merit. The judge will be Jesus Christ Himself. As He comes into view, the very Shekinah glory of His presence will dissolve those things in our lives that He had not done. That which had not been done in the Spirit, as obedience to the Word, will be dissolved. All that will be left will be those things that He has done through us. For a reward for the things which He has done, as we learned in I Corinthians 3:101-5, we will be given crowns with jewels in them. These will not be merit badges for us to wear on our clothes in heaven, but rather they will be jewels and crowns as we found in Revelation 4:11, that we can cast at the feet of the King and have the more with which to worship Him and praise Him for who He is.

Principle 3- God has illustrated obedience everywhere, so look for it. Most of us need to work a little harder at looking for obedience. If we are honest with ourselves, nature and the world about us have many examples of obedience that we need. The world as we see it today is under the dominion of sin. However, the elements are able under command to still obey God. In fact, the laws of prosperity, as far as nature is concerned, are still tied to obeying certain basic laws.

There were a series of films shown in the 1960's named the Moody Science Films. These films took this basic concept and taught the gospel through it. The laws of nature point to the basic truth that God is in perfect control. There are spiritual laws as well as physical laws that parallel these basic truths. We live in a world that is under the dominion of sin, but the elements are able, under command from God, to obey.

As believers, you and I also live in a world that is under the dominion of sin by virtue of our old sin nature. However, under command and under the leading of the Spirit, we are able to obey.

We need to realize that we can learn so much by watching nature. We need to see that wind, rain, snow, rainbows and all of the elements of nature teach the character of God. Wind teaches the picture of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us this in John 3. Rain and the snow are mentioned in Isaiah 55. This passage tells us that they are portraits of the Word of God and the grace of God. The rainbow at the end of a storm is a portrait of the mercy of God. Thunder is a portrait of the power of God. Lightning is a

Illustrations of Obedience

portrait of the revelation and wisdom of God. Every element of nature speaks to us of the character of God. This ought to encourage our hearts and give us an excitement about who He is and what He does.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE STORM

Let's turn to Matthew 8:23. We will see again an illustration of how nature gives us an example of its response of obedience to the King. This is a story that is familiar to many. It is the story of Jesus and the disciples in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. There are three points I want us to consider as we read through it.

1) *Jesus led the disciples into the storm.* He led them there for two reasons: in order to display His power and to test His disciples.

2) *Jesus rested in the storm for two reasons: to display His peace and to test His disciples.*

3) *Jesus rebuked the storm for two reasons: in order to display His authority and to teach His disciples.*

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him.
[Jesus led them into the storm]

And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. [This doesn't mean that Jesus was apathetic but was at rest.]

Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying,
"Lord, save us! We are perishing!" (Matthew 8:23-25 NKJV)

I guess I can relate to this prayer. It was very self-centered. They didn't seem to be concerned that the Master was asleep and the boat was sinking and that He might go under. They had the same response we would have, "Save us, Lord! We are perishing!"

But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. (Matthew 8:26 NKJV)

We need to listen to the word "rebuke" for the rest of this lesson.

So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:27 NKJV)

I think that we need to recognize from this that Jesus' goal in this was two-fold. First, He wanted to teach His disciples concepts of faith. Secondly, He wanted to teach them concepts of

Illustrations of Obedience

obedience. This little poem can give us the answer to what we can learn from this passage.

O fearful men, what trouble
Amidst the reckless storm,
Was it not your vision blurred
Saw not the Lord's strong arm?

O faithless men, what questions asked,
Why were you so surprised?
When with a word the Master spoke
And silenced stormy skies.

Should we so wonder that He rules
The storm, the wind, the sea,
Or question, if the winds obey
Then, Lord, why shouldn't we?

CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

That's the lesson we can learn from the storm. Let's turn now to Mark 1:21-27. Here we see another example of Jesus' authority. We also see another example of unwilling obedience.

Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught.

And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

(Mark 1:21,22 NKJV)

Christ's authority was based on the fact that He spoke truth based upon His Father's Word. This is where our authority comes from. If we have any authority in our lives, it is based on the Word and the power that is in the Word. It is not based upon anything we do or anything we say.

Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,

saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth?"

(Mark 1:23,24b NKJV)

So the first thing we learn about the unclean spirit is that it was plural. There were a multitude of demons in one person. They were representing themselves as one.

"Did You come to destroy us?"

(Mark 1:24c NKJV)

You might underline that word "destroy" and some time go

Illustrations of Obedience

back in the Scripture and study the experiences or encounters that Jesus had with demonic activity. We can recognize that the demons had a very clear understanding of the intensity of the struggle between themselves and God. They knew that God's goal was to destroy them, and their goal was to destroy Christ in the life of the believer. We are told in Scripture that Satan's goal is to march to and fro around the world seeking those whom he may devour or destroy. There is an intense spiritual struggle that you and I sometimes take far too lightly. The demons often have a greater awareness of the intensity of the struggle than we do. In this passage they asked, "Have you come to destroy us?"

They also, unfortunately, have a more honest response to the presence of God. They said,

"I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

(Mark 1:24d NKJV)

They were confronted with a need to obey, and they were fearful because they recognized who Jesus was. I don't mean in any way to elevate the demonic host, far from it. I do want to make the point that we, as believers who are endued with the Holy Spirit, sometimes walk around with an attitude of a phlegmatic spirit toward the enemy. We cease to realize that Satan's goal is to destroy Christ in us. God's goal is to deal with him completely. Satan knows and we ought to know who Jesus is and the authority that He has in dealing with him. Satan said in this passage that he recognized who Christ was, the Holy One of God. The Scripture tells us that the demons believe and tremble. They know who He is.

Part of our problem, in terms of obedience, is that we do not really grasp who Christ is. If you were to stand in the presence of a king and openly disobey an edict that he had handed down to his subjects, you would be filled with fear and embarrassment. Yet, we as believers will somehow allow ourselves to do just that in the presence of the King of kings. The demons said, "I know who You are, the Holy One of God." We see this word "rebuke" again as we read,

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"

(Mark 1:25 NKJV)

And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.

(Mark 1:26 NKJV)

Illustrations of Obedience

There is always a battle when obedience is involved. The battle confirms the fact that a need is present.

Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." (Mark 1:27 NKJV)

So another illustration of obedience is given here with the unclean spirits who obey contrary to their will. We, as believers, are given greater freedom of choice because it pleases the King to have willing subjects. He desires to rule with love rather than with a rod of iron. It is the love of Christ that ought to constrain us to obedience. This does not indicate the absence of power, rather the presence of power. It takes a much greater power to give us the freedom to obey than it would for Him to force us to obey.

In Deuteronomy 11:1-12, we find another illustration of obedience. We are looking at the principle of God's picture book of cause and effect in the Old Testament. The children of Israel were specifically told that when they obeyed there would be blessing. When they disobeyed, they were told there would be divine discipline. Ask yourself these questions, and think about your answers.

Question 1- Is there a relative relationship between intellect, ability and obedience? When thinking about this question, consider that I want to deal with this in terms of relative intelligence. There is a level of intelligence that a person comes to in which he becomes trainable and teachable. This is a low level of intelligence. From this point forward, the more intelligent a person becomes oftentimes the less teachable he becomes. We often reach a point where self-sufficiency, ego and an unteachable spirit take over.

I believe this is why not many wise and not many noble have been chosen. Some have, but not many. The reason is that the greater the need for dependence and the lack of wisdom in our own eyes, the greater our opportunity to obey. We have learned from the examples in this lesson, both with the demons and the wind, there is not a great deal of intelligence necessary to obey. Oftentimes many parents hope for a genius when their children are born. From the world's perspective this is desirable. But if you are blessed with children who have moderate or average

Illustrations of Obedience

intelligence, you ought to rejoice because this is how spiritual giants are made. These are those who God can put His hand on with the absence of an intense struggle that says, “I can,” “I will,” “I must,” and “I am.”

Question 2- What affect do prior experiences have on obedience, particularly in the area of presumption? Many times we will find that young Christians tend to obey more implicitly than those of us who have been around longer. The reason is that we experience the grace of God and then presume upon the grace of God. Because of this, we fail to obey. As a young Christian, there is a holy, awesome fear that you don't want to do anything to tread upon the blood of Jesus Christ. You respond in obedience as quickly as you can. You don't want to do anything that will grieve the heart of God. As you grow in your faith, you make some mistakes. You intentionally disobey on occasions and God's grace comes in to forgive and cleanse you. Sometimes there is no direct discipline because of your disobedience. As a result of that, you tend to presume upon the grace of God. You determine that His level of accountability for you is not as great. You cease to be as sensitive and as tender to His Spirit as you once were.

As we think upon these two questions, let's recognize that we ought to become scripturally more sensitive to obedience rather than less as we grow in the Lord.

Principle 4- We of ourselves do not possess the power to obey. We only possess the capacity to choose to obey. The reason is that the power is God. I didn't say that the power was “of” God, but more perfectly, the power “is” God. It is a basic part of His character that is transfused in us by grace. He is our power. He is our wisdom. He is our knowledge. He is our sanctification. He is our redemption.

This power is released by grace, and it is never deserved. It is proportionate to our need, to our request and to our exercise of faith. The greater the need, the more grace is given. The more grace, the more power is given. It is proportionate to the request. It is a requirement that we have in order to have the power to obey. If we ask, we *shall* receive. If we *seek*, we shall find. If we *knock*, it shall be opened. This power is also proportionate to our exercise of faith. This is the vehicle for its release.

We lost power to our house this morning. I blamed it on our neighbors, but it wasn't their fault. None of us are generators.

Illustrations of Obedience

They, like us, are nothing more than conductors. We are not power sources. We are not generators of spiritual power. We do not have the authority or the power to obey. We are conductors. It is our responsibility to give the generator the freedom to flow through us. When our electric power came back on, there was such a relief. The same is true in our Christian life. There is relief when we depend upon God for our power.

There are three steps to appropriating the power that is ours. The first is decision. The second is dependence. The third is deliberate enactment. There are areas in all of our lives where we want to obey. Paul said that we want to, but we can't. We want to, but we don't. It is a besetting problem and we struggle with it continually. The first step to overcome it is a decision by an act of the will that we choose to obey. The second is an act of dependence because choosing to obey in the energy of the flesh is fruitless. The act of dependence involves a cry for the desire to obey and a cry for the strength to obey. Our third step is a deliberate enactment or a first step of faith.

All of you can remember a time when you were struggling with a great decision in your life. God began to move in your life. It seemed like an eternity, but you just couldn't move. Then you took a first step, and after that it was almost as if you were driven to accomplish what He had put before you. Maybe it was some kind of profession of faith. Maybe it was a decision you had to make. Maybe it was a place you had to go. It was that first step of faith that was required on your part before God was able to superimpose your life with the freedom of the Spirit, so that you could complete the call. In other words, you begin to act as though you have what you asked for. As you do so, God miraculously comes to your rescue.

The key to this can be found in Joseph's life. When he was confronted with the ability to interpret dreams, he said, "It is not in me. God can do it." Ian Thomas has a saying that is so meaningful to us as Christians, and we need to consider memorizing it. Every time we get into a situation where God's power is needed, we need to simply remember these three things. He said, "I can't. God can. I will let Him." We are to have an awareness of need and a release of dependence upon Him.

Here Jesus says,

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me,

Illustrations of Obedience

and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”
(John 15:5 NKJV)

In other words, you, in yourself, do not have the capacity to obey. In myself I do not have the capacity to do any good thing. But Christ in me and Christ in you possess the capacity to do it all.

In John 5:19, the Jews were seeking to kill Christ, because He was not only breaking the Sabbath, but He was calling God His Father, making Himself equal with God. We read,

Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”
(John 15:19 NKJV)

Now this was Jesus talking, and He does only what He sees the Father do. He was created in the Father’s image, and while on this earth, He responded only to the Father’s works.

“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.”
(John 15:20 NKJV)

“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”
(John 15:30 NKJV)

In John 8:28 we read,

Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.”
(John 8:28 NKJV)

In the next lesson we will look at the fifth principle. This principle deals with what is God’s desire for our response to counsel, to instruction and to relationships with those who encourage disobedience. We have dealt with four principles in this lesson. God has given us ample illustrations of obedience in nature and in His Word. God has convinced us through His Word that of ourselves we cannot obey. We do not have the authority to obey apart from Him. We do not have the energy apart from Him to obey. But, we have available *in Him* all that we need to continually be obedient to His perfect will. The key to our obedience is a continued awareness of the areas that He is speaking to us in. We then need to have continued dependence upon Him for the power to obey.

Illustrations of Obedience

The power for us to obey is available to us through Him. Unlike our generator at home, God's generator never fails. You can plug in all that you want, and it will still work. The key is that the minute we unplug and separate ourselves from the source of the power, we do not have the capacity to be faithful.

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer

(06.18.15)