

Obey Christ Completely

Bethany's Call:

1 John 3:3-10

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One day a friend of mine opened a newspaper and read his obituary. Dick discovered that his name was on the manifest of an airplane that crashed and left no survivors. He phoned his family to let them know he was alive, and he recalled his internal battle, his change of plans and waving to the flight attendant who then closed the plane's door. Dick realized that this was no coincidence, even though he made choices. He believed God was involved at every step.

Do you think God abandons his beloved creation to chance, coincidence, the roll of the die, to blind, accidental luck? Do you like Dick think God is involved with your every step? Despite pain and disappointment has a divine hand responded to your every choice? Have you been guided and protected? Is your presence, your participation with this congregation accidental or divinely orchestrated? If communities and congregations are not accidents, then we are divinely put together. There must be a purpose, both collective and individual. If God sees us as children rather than machines, then he wants us to know our purpose. Purpose is revealed in the Scriptures he gave us. In response, we at Bethany defined our mission: *Go and bring people to faith and freedom in Jesus Christ.* This is the heartbeat of Jesus. Yet, how do we do it? What has God said and sown among us to direct us in our mission? What vision do we have?

Not by accident, God sent a young man to Rochester forty-seven years ago to knock on doors and organize the church called Bethany. Not by accident, that young man, Richard Harper, still lives and recently shared much of the vision with us. In Bethany's first brochure

and in Bethany's first sermon, Richard declared Article #1 of Bethany's reason for being: "*We seek to bring a faithful witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Brothers and sisters, we bring a faithful witness only as we *are* witnesses. Many people, who witnessed the ministry of Jesus and the death of Jesus, were not witnesses. Witnesses are people who are so affected by what they experience that their attitudes and actions accurately represent the reality. They comprehend and they communicate. Jesus said:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8, NIV)

When we are profoundly affected by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we begin to comprehend and naturally communicate the reality of Jesus. At that point, we become like Jesus who brought us a faithful witness to God.

Jesus was a faithful witness because, according to 1 John 3:3, "Christ is pure." That means Christ trusted God with no hint of unbelief. He spoke of God and acted in response to God in a way that accurately represents God to others. His attitude and actions represented God as trustworthy, worthy of our obedience. Indeed, the writer of Hebrews said that Jesus learned to obey God completely. If we are to bring faithful witness to Christ and accurately represent him, we must obey Christ completely. How do we do that?

Two biblical characters, King Saul and Abraham, show us. King Saul obeyed God when it seemed good to him. He obeyed God when it was easy to do so. Similarly, most children obey their parents when it seems good to them and when it is easy to do so. However, there are times when it isn't. That is when King Saul got in trouble. King Saul was religious. He was installed by a religious leader; and facing war, the religious leader commanded him to wait to attack until a designated time when a sacrifice would be offered on behalf of the nation. The sacrifice was important because God could bless the nation if judgment for their national sins

was removed by it. When King Saul saw that his army was melting away in fear and that his inaction was contributing, he offered the sacrifice himself. He didn't trust or obey the call to wait. He feared loss. *We and our children have difficulty obeying when we fear loss*, whether it is reputation, security, fulfillment, comfort, relationships, power, money or whatever. On a second occasion God was judging a city, not rewarding King Saul's nation. He was to take no plunder. King Saul disobeyed because the plunder was too lucrative to pass up. It was too good an opportunity. We and our children struggle to obey when obedience requires us to *pass up an opportunity* that substantially benefits us. This can be opportunities in athletics, recreation, finance, business or whatever. In contrast, consider the faith and obedience of Abraham. Although the sacrifice of Isaac is unfathomable to us, archeology shows that other kings sacrificed the lives of their sons to incur the favor of some deity. This is what the author of Hebrews writes:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (Hebrews 11:17-19, NIV)

Abraham obeyed despite the prospect of great personal loss and missed opportunity. The Bible attributes Abraham's obedience to his faith in God's ability and character. Ultimately, to trust God completely, Abraham had to believe that God's word was given in love and wisdom.

Similarly, do you believe that every word of Scripture was given in love and wisdom for you? Do you believe that every word from Jesus and every attitude of Jesus is worth trusting? Do you believe they purely express God's love and wisdom for you?

Two things help us grow a faith that matters, a faith that obeys. One is community. Two is experience. The Bible says:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2, NIV)

Our vision and behavior are affected by who we spend time with and what we do with our time.

Are you growing with others in your understanding and application of the Bible? Do you hear the outcome of obedience in lives of those who believe and meditate on God's word? Is this becoming the culture of your life? You are either growing in obedience or disobedience through your fellowship with others. Also, your faith is growing or shrinking from your experience. The Bible says:

Although (Jesus) was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:8-9, NIV)

We are told that Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered. He learned the challenge of obedience. He also learned the value of obedience as he experienced the benefit of God's love and wisdom. The same was true of Abraham. Is it of us?

Are we growing in confidence from our individual and collective obedience of Christ? Do we endure losses and miss opportunities because we trust God's word? Do you see more and more each day the relevance of Scriptures and the need to obey completely? God's calling you to witness to the value of his love and wisdom by trusting and obeying completely his word. That is our first call. That is the first order of business for us personally and corporately. In the Great Commission to make disciples, Jesus commanded us to *go* to people, to *baptize* people and to *teach* people, not so much about God or Jesus, but to teach *people to obey everything* Jesus commanded. A disciple is defined by a faith that obeys everything commanded of us. Are you a disciple of Jesus? Only a disciple actually believes and brings a faithful witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is God's call and vision for you and me, and us together.