

Obedience Through It All

- The other day Sophie came home from school and said that she wasn't allowed to play in the field at school.
 - o Like most schools, her school has a playground area and a giant grassy field for kids to play in.
 - o Usually this wouldn't be a big deal, but Sophie has friends in another grade 1 class and they are allowed to play in the field...this whole ordeal is extremely frustrating for a 6 year old.
 - o In pushing further, Sophie reiterated, "My teacher says that we can't play in the field."
 - Even though it hurt her to not get to play with her friends, she made the decision that she would rather obey the directions given to her than choose to do her own thing.
- With the person beside you (or a couple people near you), I have a couple questions for you to answer:
 - o If you have been given a rule or a guideline do you tend to obey the rule? Break the rule? Bend the rule?
 - o Why do you tend to respond the way that you do?
 - Yes, I know that a lot of your response is going to depend on the situation or the rule.
 - If you need some guidelines...imagine you are a 6 year old at school given the same instructions as Sophie.
 - Or, use the guideline of driving...there are all sorts of rules and guidelines when it comes to driving...how do you tend to respond?
- How we respond very much plays to our personalities.
 - o When I was in school, I got sent to the office once for throwing snowballs and it was like the worst thing ever.
 - I basically thought my life was going to be over.
 - o Some of you are most definitely rule breakers, or at the very least rule benders...you want to see how far you can push the boundaries.
- Throughout Isaiah there are 4 servant songs:
 - o Isaiah 42 tells us about the chosen servant who didn't abuse his God-given power, but lived a life of sacrifice for those around him.

- Isaiah 49 tells us of the commissioned servant who sees human brokenness even when life seems to have forgotten about that brokenness.
- The third servant song is found in Isaiah 50 and tells us about the obedient servant who comes face to face with all sorts of things.

READ Isaiah 50:4-11

- Ultimately, we see this servant as the Messiah, Jesus, whom we discover in the Gospels.
 - There are parts of these servant songs that are very Jesus-esque...we read it and we can't help but say, "Of course Isaiah is talking about Jesus."
 - The fourth servant song that we are going to be looking at on Saturday evening at the retreat is exactly that.
 - There are other parts of the servant songs that seem to be talking about people...maybe even you and I.
 - There's a tension as we read scripture where multiple things can be true at the same time, especially when we read the text in light of the historical context.
 - As Israelites would have read the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, they would have read it knowing that there is a reference to the Messiah, but they also would have read it looking around at the people beside them saying, "Is he talking about us?"
 - "Is he talking about Moses? Ezekiel? Is he talking about himself as the "servant"?"
 - Or there may have been some questions about this servant being a collective...one of the themes of the first half of Isaiah is of the remnant...the faithful few who pursue God instead of pursuing their own desires.
 - They may have asked, "Is this servant us as a group of people who are following God faithfully?"
 - The readers of Isaiah are not reading this text saying, "Ah yes, Jesus" the way that we might be doing.
 - In this text, maybe you actually see yourself in the description of the servant and the Sovereign Lord is being faithful to you
 - As we work through the text we are going to look at it from the perspective of Jesus, the obedient servant, but also you and I, and what it means for us to be obedient to the Sovereign Lord...let's jump into it.
 - We start with the obedient servant being sustained by the Sovereign Lord.
 - Lord has given the servant words of wisdom.
 - What are those words of wisdom?
 - The Torah would have been a part of that...the first 5 books of the Bible, which were foundational to Israelite life and belief

and practice...Jesus would have been very familiar with the Torah.

- Psalms and Proverbs likely would have been these words of wisdom as well.
 - Psalms was the songbook of the Israelites.
 - Proverbs is known largely as the book of wisdom.
- These words of wisdom though aren't just rules to hear and follow, but they are the message of life and salvation that overflows to those who are weary.
 - The obedient servant is aware of the need all around.
 - The obedient servant isn't just basking in the words of wisdom saying, "These words of wisdom are all for me"...they are for the good of others too.
 - How true is that for us too?
 - At young adults on Wednesday, Tim looked at me and asked if I was okay saying, I looked tired and weary.
 - I responded with "I am fine"...the response we often give...
 - But I reflected a little bit more on it over the following days and realized that other people can often see in me what I can't necessarily see in myself.
 - There are people who are tired, hurting, broken, and weary all around us...sometimes they need the words of wisdom from the Sovereign Lord to sustain them.
- The servant also learns the will of God daily as the Lord has spoken to the servant.
 - To be woken daily to the voice of God...how much does that matter to you?
 - I can't help but think that that would be an amazing experience.
 - I also think that is something that is on the table for anyone, but for most of us, we are awoken by an alarm but tend to snooze the alarm to get a little more sleep.
 - Or we roll out of bed and pick up our cell phone to see what we have missed over night.
 - Or we get up and begin the routine to get ready...get dressed, brush teeth, eat breakfast, and then out the door.

- Too often, we...or maybe it is just me...we don't give ourselves the space or the margins to be awoken to the voice of God because we plan our lives the way we want to plan them.
 - The obedient servant heard the voice of God, but then also took the time to listen.
 - When we get busy, listening can be so hard.
 - English writer George Eliot once wrote, "Receptiveness is a rare and massive power." (The Interpreter's Bible: Isaiah, p 583)
 - To hear, to listen, and to understand is hard work.
 - But it is when we are attuned to the voice of God, just as the obedient servant was, we come to know the will of God for us.
- When the servant hears the Sovereign Lord and listens to the Sovereign Lord, perseverance becomes a lot easier.
 - Verse 5 tells us that because the "Lord has spoken AND I have listened...I have not rebelled or turned away."
 - Obedience to the will of God in the midst of suffering and shame and trials can lead to responses that are unusual in the world.
 - Having someone beat me will likely cause me to want to fight back.
 - It is in verse 5 and 6 that we can pretty easily draw the comparison to Jesus.
 - Matthew 26:67 – "They began to spit in Jesus' face and beat him with their fists." (NLT)
 - Ringing in the background is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount... "If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also." (Matthew 5:39, NLT)
 - Jesus gave himself to suffering and shame in a way that none of us can ever match.
 - Yet we are called to persevere, reading in the book of James that "God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation...[receiving] the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12, NLT)
 - Jesus didn't run, but heard the voice of the Sovereign Lord and sought the will of the Lord and gave himself to enduring through the suffering, which bore much fruit.
 - What does obedience look like for you and I in the midst of suffering.
 - Obedience to the will of God is much harder...maybe even impossible, whether we are faced with suffering or seasons of joy if we aren't first listening to God.
 - Obedience by willpower is nearly impossible compared to obedience when we listen to the Sovereign Lord.

- In listening to the voice of God and in pursuing obedience to God in the face of suffering, the Sovereign Lord proves present and faithful to vindicate the injustice.
 - God helps the servant just as God is faithful today.
 - God standing for his people in the face of injustice is kind of like the TV shows where you have a kid being picked on and bullied by a group of other kids, and the kid who is being picked on is trying to fight back mostly unsuccessfully, but then behind the picked on kid there appears a big person...the older brother, the kid from an older grade, the kids who have played football and it shows...and then the bullies just slink away.
 - As we come face to face with trials and injustices God isn't going to just step up and take it away and immediately resolve the conflict in our favour, but God is present...God has got our backs, when we find ourselves up against the wall.
 - That is what the obedient servant reiterates...
 - The Lord is present...the Lord helps me...so:
 - I won't be disgraced
 - I won't be put to shame
 - I don't have to fight the injustices on my own
 - I don't have to fight against people who accuse me
 - I am not guilty
 - My enemies have no power over me
 - Because God has my back.
 - The obedient servant that suffers suffers not because of anything that he has done, but suffers because others were guilty.
 - That is Jesus!
 - That is my king.
 - That is your king.
- The last two verses then lay out the two opposing options.
 - These two verses are not directed at the obedient servant, but are directed at you and I.
 - They are questions that we must answer for ourselves?
 - 1) Do you fear the Lord and obey his servant?
 - 2) Do you live in your own light and warm yourself by your own fire?
 - Are you living your life in obedience to the King of kings and Lord of lords?
 - Or are you living according to your own desires and wants and wishes?
 - These are questions of life and death.

- Fearing the Lord and obeying the obedient servant Jesus leads to exactly what we have been looking at...God sustaining, revealing his will, and then walking alongside his people.
- Walking only in step with yourself leads to great torment.
- Walking in step with God does not equate with a perfect life.
 - Isaiah 50:10 indicates that darkness can very much be a part of walking with God... “if you are walking in the darkness...trust in the Lord.”
 - In the darkness, it is faith in the Sovereign Lord that anchors us, not our changing circumstances, where the darkness becomes light and magically goes away.
 - Faith is persevering in the midst of the darkness while we listen to the voice of the Father who leads us.
 - And we can be reminded that “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and that the New Jerusalem where God will reign has no need for light because “the glory of God illuminates the city.” (Revelation 21:23)
 - In living life for the Sovereign Lord, we come to see that darkness is temporary because light wins...God is victorious.
 - And we come to know that God is the giver of abundant life through the highs and lows that we experience.
- Walking in step with your own light leads to torment...leads to death.
 - Depending on your translation, you may read “you warm yourselves by your own fires” (NLT) or “you equip yourselves with burning torches” (ESV) or “you walk in light of the sparks you have kindled” (NKJV)
 - Regardless of which it is, it is your doing, not God’s...it is you removing yourself from God’s plan.
 - We live in forest fire central in BC...if you have ever watched a spark that you kindled get away, you know the destruction that can ensue.
- So, each of us find ourselves at a crossroads.
 - Do I choose life in pursuit of the Sovereign Lord and the Obedient Servant?
 - Or do I choose my wants on this earth which ends in great torment?
 - It is easy to say, “I want life” but when life crumbles and we lose power and our situations change, then it becomes much easier for us to move towards that torment, as we take control of our circumstances.
- The obedient servant is Jesus, who obeyed the Father through the chaos.
 - The obedient servant opens his arms saying, “Come to me all you who are weary and carry a heavy burden and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)
- Is the obedient servant worth following?

- Is it worthwhile listening to the words of wisdom that come from the Sovereign Lord?
- Is it worth it to persevere and turn the other cheek when suffering is so prevalent?
- Is it worth it to rest in the arms of God who offers help?
 - I would say yes, but I can't make that decision for you.
- One of the markers of abundant life is the communion meal.
 - As Jesus gathered with his disciples right before he was crucified, he shared a meal of life with them...communion...the Lord's Supper...the love feast.
 - And he told his disciples to do this over and over again in remembrance of the chosen servant, the commissioned servant, the obedient servant, and the suffering servant.
 - This communion meal is a meal that we take together too, remembering Jesus and the life that is offered to us out of his death and resurrection.
 - It is a meal that is meant for those who fear the Lord and obey his servant.
 - It is a meal for those who are walking in darkness without a ray of light, yet still trusting in the Lord and relying on their God.
 - It is a meal in which we say, I am living my life for the Sovereign Lord, committing to listening to him, to persevering and seeking his will and trusting him with all that I am.
 - It is also a meal where God extends his graces to us calling us his sons and daughters.
 - Before we share communion together, I invite you to pause for a moment and reflect on the question, "Is following Jesus worth it?"

PAUSE

- If you answered yes...if you have even the slightest inkling that Jesus is worth it, even if you are still figuring it out, please take communion.
 - Communion isn't for those who are perfect and have figured life out, but it is for people who have placed their trust in the servant that Isaiah describes.
 - If you aren't at a place where you are ready to put your faith in Jesus, feel free to pass on communion today.
- As we take communion together, I want you to imagine that you are sitting alongside Jesus, the chosen, commissioned, obedient and suffering servant, and hearing him speak these words.
 - Matthew 26:26ff

Is following Jesus worth it? Not because obedience guarantees an easy road—Isaiah is honest that God's people may still walk through darkness. But it is worth it because the Sovereign Lord speaks, sustains, helps, and vindicates; and because Jesus, the Obedient

Servant, has opened his arms to weary people like us. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.