

THE OBEY PART

Series: Stories of the Kingdom
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Obedience, Faith Like a child
John 3:5-8

So we have been talking about the Kingdom of God. And I have been inviting us to understand the Kingdom of God as not necessarily a geographical place but a realm or a reality of life in which God is in charge. A reality where we are under God's power and authority.

I mentioned that when we get into this reality, everything about our lives changes and we should be ready for that. That the experience of the reality of God's Kingdom is so valuable that it will bring us to giving up everything else we have valued up to that point. It is so beautiful and profound that nothing would keep us from that reality.

And that sometimes the challenge is that we are expecting very little. Sometimes we live in this place where it seems as if it makes no difference. Knowing God and not knowing him makes no difference.

We sometimes live life as Kingdom life is just about a bunch of rituals and a bunch of rules. Nothing fundamentally changes about us. And God keeps inviting us to more. To expect more, to look out for more. It is living life knowing that something big can happen anytime. Praying knowing that things are changing, and sometimes even as we watch.

It is the invitation to look into our world with hope and expectation. Asking ourselves, "where is God moving?"

But to be in this place requires what we were talking about last weekend. To repent, which I told you guys in that context Jesus used it meant to change the way you look at these things.

It is to disown and disarm things in our culture and narratives that come in opposition to stepping into this reality. It is stepping into a different paradigm. It is a totally different way of seeing life. Because sometimes the ways we set up our lives is in opposition to all that God is inviting us to.

And I just wanna talk a bit about that reality. You know some of us may have left asking, okay great idea but how do I do that? What does that even mean? Repent also means to have faith like a child.

I am guessing that a good number of you have been around kids at some point in your life. Either here or elsewhere at home. Was walking home and I saw one of those road signs that read, "STOP CHILDREN". And It is funny that even the government knows that kids often need to be stopped and they are looking for public participation in that.

Anyway, if you have been around kids, who is the strongest person to a kid? Has any of us encountered kids before? Kids do not doubt that their fathers are the strongest amongst all fathers and their mothers amongst all mothers. They believe their parents are stronger than all parents and all forces.

When I was a kid, the worst threat you could give was saying that you could beat someone up and their father too. Growing up, we believed that our parents were stronger than the force of the police.

Some cultures have a tradition at around Christmas of hiding an elf which is just a doll. And in the morning the kids would search for it. I think the reward is candy. But the kids believe that the elf finds its way to these hiding places. So parents are always staying up long after the kids are asleep, tiptoeing around the house to hide the elf and play surprised the next morning when the kids find it.

Has a kid ever told you the story of their favourite unicorn? Ahadi the daughter of our kids' pastor comes to staff meetings with us. And we have a culture of starting by just checking in on people and how they are doing. Everything passes just to touch base with each other before we transact any business. And whenever she is part of the meeting, Ahadi gets a turn too. And sometimes she says some of the most incredible stories. Her face is lit up, her emotions are lit up. For her, the story she is telling us is as real as we are sitting in that meeting with her.

Let's watch these 2 videos

Those 2 kids actually believe the story they are telling

And I recognize the danger of childlike faith that cannot withstand the adult world. I recognize that so many people walk away from the faith they received as a child because as they grew up something major happened in their lives and they could not reconcile it

with their childhood faith. Or they went to college or travelled the world and their lecturers started asking questions that shook their childhood faith and they walked away. The invitation is to be adults who can see the world like children do. It is both and.

But is it not sad that growing up we lose something about our existence? Psychologists always before to the inner child and how much even as adults we never quite run away from them. What we learn is to cover and cloth them in our new realities.

We learn to speak and language and unfortunately lose our ability to communicate. Have you ever seen the purity of a child expressing their love for other kids or their playmates or family? It s so pure and unrestricted. Then we teach them language and all over the world, we have adults who cannot give or receive love?

Something special about kids is that for them, there are no dichotomies in life. Faith and life are not 2 separate things, just one. Their imagination and reality are not 2 separate things, they are just reality.

You tell a kid to pray about something, they pray without any doubt in their heart, and they are full of expectation. When they see things happen they do not doubt that God is moving around. Tell a child to look around and see where Jesus in the room and their purity of faith they will see him in the room.

So what do we get into? I think the best growing up to do is to become adults, learn language, the beauty of the physical world and still not lose our childhood wonder and faith.

So the idea is not to remain children like, I think. As we have seen so many times that some of that does not hold under the scrutiny of adult life. But to uphold the tension. Saying, "yes I know that this is odd in this dimension but it is a reality in God's reality." Accepting God's word as children do. This is what repentance is.

This is another way Jesus framed the idea of repentance.

Mark 10:15

"Truly I tell you, anyone, who will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

So it not either-or. It is not either an adult or a child. It both as an adult learn to see the world as a child does. It is looking at the realities of life and saying to them,

“Yes, but God...”

This is exactly how a child would respond to the world. The eyes filled with optimism, hope and expectation. Because of God...

And just as we ended last week’s conversation, it is okay if you are struggling to believe. It is okay if you wanna change your mindset and you are having a hard time with it. I am sorry for all those who have felt that being a believer meant that you never struggled with doubt even one day. I am sorry for those times around the church people have made you feel like you can only be in if you have it all neatly tied together. So I invited us to make this prayer

“I believe Lord, Help my unbelief”

The invitation to the Kingdom of God is so amazing, that God would not think twice about helping you through unbelief. If he loved us enough to give up his son, helping you through unbelief is a simple thing.

A friend of mine gave a very interesting illustration for some of what I wanna invite us to today. So, we some good gear around here. Not top of the line but some good sound gear here. And sometimes the mix is just so good.

The worship team is on point, the lights are working as they should and the slides are cued in right on time. We can see all the lights we can hear the sound, some of us can feel the vibrations of everything that is happening but we intuitively know but cannot quite see is the power that is running it all.

All this gear would be nothing unless we plug them to the power source and switch them on.

See, the Kingdom of God works the same way. The rule of God, the life of the Kingdom, the power of God, the reality of God’s reign requires that we are plugged into God and that the Holy Spirit is moving in us.

We can see the move of the Holy Spirit even though we cannot see Him.

John 3:5-8

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

And this is the key. I think we can listen to the most convincing sermons and talk but unless we are plugged into what powers the reality of the Kingdom of God, all of it is just pointless. Unless we receive the Holy Spirit all of it.

And just like power, and just like the wind. And you know if electricity was available at Jesus' time he may have used electricity for his illustration. Anyway, just like electricity and wind, you cannot see it but you can feel it on your skin, you can hear it rush through the trees and leaves, you can see it at work in peoples lives.

This is what makes the difference between music and music when the Holy Spirit is moving because then there is a difference and you can see it. You can see it on people's faces. You can see it on people's skin. You can see it as people are filled with joy or filled with tears as grief is lifted and comfort is brought.

I have heard people say that how they knew that this was the church they wanted to be part of is from the moment they walked in they could tell there was a difference. There was a presence. For some, they had no framework for what they were experiencing but they knew they wanted to stay. For others, they outrightly knew that God was among us. It was not something physically in itself but you could see the impact on people both instantly and gradually. You could see the impact of the Holy Spirit on people's lives.

The Holy Spirit is the source, the power that flows and empowers us for work in God's Kingdom. Nothing works without Him. Everything is pointless without him.

So I have said over and over again that Jesus was the King that had been prophesied in the Hebrew scriptures which make our old testament. And he comes into the scene declaring the Kingdom of God is at hand. But there is a very distinct point in the life of Jesus that he starts doing and proclaiming the things he was doing.

Jesus has grown up, getting favour with both people and before God. Then Jesus goes to the river Jordan where his cousin John was doing his ministry. This guy was baptizing people. And next week we will be celebrating baptisms. John would stand at the edge of the river and say ***“Repent for the Kingdom of God is near.”*** The same message as Jesus would later begin to preach.

So Jesus gets baptized by John and as Jesus gets out of the water, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit comes like a dove and rests on Jesus. Listen, Jesus functioned under the power of the Holy Spirit. Everything Jesus was able to do and everything Jesus said was because he was filled, fueled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And here is the good news, it is the same Holy Spirit that we get to be filled with. The same power with which Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, spoke calmness to the raging storm. The same power that rose Jesus from the grave and conquered the grave lives in us.

So what keeps us from this?

Some of us just haven't opened themselves up to receive the Holy Spirit. And this is probably because of what we were talking about last week. Some of the stories we have bought into the need to be abandoned for us to enter into the realm of the Kingdom of God. To accept the invitation as children do. The word for me this season has been faith like a child. And I think it is different from childhood faith.

I love science, I love philosophy, I love studying world religions and I love history and even studying the history of the Bible. In some of these areas of study, childhood faith is greatly challenged. Faith like a child is choosing to believe. It's recognizing that the invitation is to a different realm, one which you can only enter through the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith like a child is praying the prayer from last week,

"Lord I believe, help my unbelief"

And so today we will be praying for anyone who would like to receive the Holy Spirit. Some people receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

The other thing, I think is we are often in a hurry. And again our culture is a very rushed one. So even when we pray, we just say a few words and we are ready to rush out of there. When we are gathered in worship, we wanna get from one thing to the next. From one song to the next. My team and I have been talking about how not to rush.

Can we as a community learn to slow down? Not be in a hurry when it comes to God's presence? Can we rediscover silence? Can we rediscover stillness? Can we rediscover the power of waiting?

During prayer ministry time some people find it very weird or awkward that we would just be silent for a while. Or after praying for them we will just watch for a while. And you can imagine because it is cultural for people to shut their eyes hard when they pray when they realize that you have been quiet for a while they begin to wonder if you are done, then they open their eyes and they meet yours watching them and they are lost for what to do?

What are we doing? We are just waiting. We are not rushing.

The other thing that I think is a big impediment is obedience. So many times people feel God moving them but they just will not step into that space. Because it is risky, but guess what, Faith is spelt RISK.

Again, because the move of God's Kingdom is a different paradigm it could feel a bit awkward or even embarrassing to do the things nudging on your heart. To say the things that just cross your mind or heart. To talk about the image you just saw. To pray for someones to receive healing. Why? It is a different paradigm.

So how do you know the Holy Spirit might be inviting you to pray for someone or walk up to someone and say something to them? You keep trying to make yourself not do it. Something keeps second-guessing that thought. You keep telling yourself, don't be silly! Don't you dare say that!

What you are experiencing is the tension of the Kingdom of God. What you are experiencing is the clash between 2 different paradigms in your heart. 2 different realities and you have to make the choice which one you are going to be alive in. And the best choice is always to obey what could be the Holy Spirit's invitation.

Go ahead and say it, go ahead and pray for them. Go ahead do it. Here is the thing, if you walk up to someone and said

"Hey, I felt like you might need prayer for this and that" or hey, "I felt like I should tell you this and that"

It is either going to be God or not, right? If it is not God, they just tell you no that does not apply to me and guess what? No one dies.

But if it is God, this person walks away encouraged that the father knows and cares about them by name. That the father is aware of their current situation. Someone leaves

enlivened. The cost of not obeying when it is God is much higher than obeying and finding out it is not.

And guess what? Every time you take the risk and obey and you see people's eyes light up with the realization that God loves them, it builds your faith for more. Every time you pray for people and you see them get healed despite the other times it did not happen, your faith and theirs is built up? So what is happening with every small act of obedience? You are getting better at living in the new paradigm.

If life in the Kingdom of God was a three-legged stool I would say it stands on: Repentance, changing your mindset and accepting the new paradigm. Abandoning worldview and attitudes that are in opposition: Being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is the only source of Kingdom life and: Obedience, boldly stepping into the things God keeps inviting you to despite the tension that keeps tagging on your heart between this realm and the realm of the Kingdom of God.

Let's Pray