

The joy of obedience

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[0 : 0 0] Now, as we read this passage in Philippians 2, from verse 12, I wonder what your first thought is when you think of that word, obedience.

Obedience. It's not normally, in the world, is it? It's not normally a word that you describe an adult. Obedient. When I think of the word obedient, it's normally the way we describe a well-trained dog or a submissive child.

They're obedient. It's not normally a character trait that you place on an adult. And I don't know why that is. I think with me, it reminds me of school and a stickler or somebody who's a stickler for their rules, doing what they're told.

However, when you boil it down, most people are actually more obedient than you think. To be obedient means that you obey an authority, an authority figure.

If the authority figure is good and the laws are good and they're good rules, then it's a good thing. Let me explain. If you go to, if any of us, or if you go to a car park, you don't normally park however you want.

[1 : 1 2] You don't normally do that. But you see what the parking car park is like. And most people see the lines and they park in the lines. Either go in or reverse in.

That's up to you. When you do that, you are obeying the rules of the car park. The authority of the person who designed it and decide this is where the car park's going to, how it's going to be lined up.

So if, if you were to park completely sideways, and you might laugh, but I've seen it done. I'm not going to say any, I do, I do have someone who probably knows about this, Stornoway Tesco car park.

I've seen, I've seen it done. But if you do that, you would be disobeying whatever the authority is that runs that car park that they've set it up.

To obey it in that instance is good. And if you do see that, you rightly call it out. Don't you think, what on earth is going there? They're disobeying the authorities.

[2 : 1 4] Think of another example. If you need to cross a busy road at traffic lights, we, if it's a busy road, we obey the red man. We teach that to our kids when they're little.

You don't cross until it's green. The system is being created and we obey it because it's a good idea. You can disobey if you want. And if there's no traffic, that's fine.

But if it is a moving, busy road, you can't just walk out. We know what will happen. The authority of the pedestrian crossing is good. It's there to protect us.

And because generally, generally, as I said, generally, everyone obeys those rules. And it includes actually the driver. He has to obey. He has to stop when the traffic light changes.

Because everybody knows that system and obeys the authority that's put it in charge there. It actually brings freedom. Because it means that you're free to cross the road and get to the other side.

- [3 : 13] So actually, you see how the law there brings freedom. That you can actually cross the road safely. So we know that whilst we might sometimes have a problem with the word obedience, probably just because it's connotations of what we think of, if the authority above us is good, then obedience is a good thing.
- And the authority that we have over the church is Jesus Christ. And he's good. He's good. And so that's what we're going to be thinking about this morning is obedience.
- And the joy of obedience. And what it means to obey him. The headline verse that continues to cover this section of Philippians. We looked at it a few weeks ago.
- It comes in chapter 1 in verse 27. I'll remind you of it. You can look over it on the other page. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- It still stands over. Like last week, we considered that the one way that we would conduct ourselves is if we were to have unity as a church. And that it would be a visible, real unity to one another that lay in the humility of the saviour.
- [4 : 23] And we see the saviour's mindset is one of humble obedience. And we are to do the same, to have humility. What we're considering this morning is why followers of Jesus are to obey the living God.
- Why we should do that. And doing that is conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Four points we're going to look at. The rule of obedience.
- The difficulty of obedience. The attractiveness of obedience. And then the fruit of obedience. So firstly, the root of obedience. The reason Christians, followers of Jesus, are able to obey God is actually very different to what we might think.
- It is because God is at work in them. The reason followers of Jesus are able to obey God is because God is at work in them. He is the root of obedience.
- He is. You think about a healthy tree. A healthy tree needs healthy roots to grow. If the roots of the tree get diseased, the rest of the tree initially, it might look healthy on the outside.
- [5 : 37] But eventually, because the roots are diseased, it will stop growing. The roots need to be healthy. And the living God is the root, the source of the Christian's life.
- Just look with me from verse 12. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and tremor.
- And here it is. Verse 13. For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose. God is at work in you.
- Which means, which really means, we don't obey God by self-determination or willpower. To obey God, we need him to be at work in us.
- It is an amazing encouragement because what it means is that if you belong to God, if you follow Jesus, it means that your roots are good. And it means that you will definitely grow.
- [6 : 41] It means you actually, you should expect to see obedience in your life because he is at work in you to fulfil his good purposes. However, we do need to pause.
- Because there could be the temptation to think, well, if it's solely down to God, is there any point in me doing anything? What responsibility do I have?
- Shouldn't I just, you know, take a step to the side and let him get on with it? It's not going to drop into your lap like that. Because verse 12 says, you see verse 12?
- As you have always obeyed, continue to work out your salvation. The reason then comes, you've got that bit in the middle. Continue to work out your salvation for it is God who works in you.

What that means is as you do that, as you consider, as you work it out, as you mull it over, perhaps, what it means to live as a follower of Jesus in your day-to-day life.

[7 : 40] As you do that and as you put it into practice, it means that God is empowering you by his spirit to live that out. That's what it means. And so be obedient.

Follow, conduct yourself in a worthy manner. Because if you do, you can't fail. You cannot fail. It will always, if you do that, it will always lead to Jesus being magnified.

Like we said the other week, like a magnifying glass makes something bigger when you look at it. When you live in that manner, when you live obedient to God, with God empowering you, it is the living God who will make Jesus bigger through your life.

We're to do it with fear and trembling because of the one who's at work in you. This is Almighty God we're talking about. It's Almighty God. It's the one who created the sun and the moon and the stars who controls the oceans working in you.

Work out what it means to live as a Christian with actually a level of seriousness about it. We don't do it sort of half-hearted, sort of slap-dash, that'll do kind of an obedience.

[8 : 50] Because it's the Almighty God. That is at work in you. I wonder what that would mean in the circumstances of our lives, the lives that we find ourselves today, to live in obedience to it.

It means that in the everyday you can do it. It means when you're picking the kids up from school and making their dinner. It means the drive home from work, doing the shopping, having a conversation with an employee at the office.

Or a parent at the school gate. It means chatting with one of your customers or your next-door neighbour. In the very ordinary details of life. What does it mean to live out the very fact that you follow Jesus Christ?

The majority of life, let's be honest, can be mundane. But that's actually where the room hits the road. Following Jesus in ordinary life, being obedient to him in those moments.

So that's the root of obedience. Second thing. The difficulty of obedience. The reason obedience is difficult is because it goes against our natural desires.

[9 : 57] It goes against our natural desires to actually get what we want. We don't want to be told what to do. And even if we actually do do the right thing, we want it to be because we've chosen to do the right thing.

Not because somebody else has told us. It's always easier actually to hear the positive command. Which is what we're going to look here at. Is that the negative one?

It's always be told what you should be doing rather than what you shouldn't. You see we get it in verse 14. We get a negative instruction what followers of Jesus shouldn't do. And I think the command at first is at first glance surprising.

You just think of all the things you might expect God to tell the church what they shouldn't be doing in order to live a life worthy of us. In order to be obedient. I don't think you expect this.

Look at me verse 14. Do everything without grumbling or arguing. That is the one thing at this particular point of the juncture in this letter that Paul chooses to tell the church that they shouldn't do.

[10 : 57] Now of course there's lots of other things the church shouldn't do. You only have to look at the ten commandments to know that. Don't murder or steal or commit adultery for example. Why is not grumbling and arguing so important here?

To really understand what that means we're going to have to just jump back in history. Consider when God's people, the Israelites, were rescued from slavery in Egypt. You remember they came through the Red Sea.

They went into the wilderness. And after they'd been rescued from being slaves. They're free. And you expect joy, celebration, lots of praise to the living God as they escaped from Egypt.

And don't get me wrong. Initially there is some of that. But as time goes on they forget. And in a book of Numbers we read all the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

And the whole assembly said, If only we had died in Egypt or in this wilderness. Why is the Lord bringing us to this land? In response the Lord says to Moses, How long will this wicked community grumble against me?

[12 : 02] I've heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. As the story goes, what we can see is they've been rescued. But this saved, rescued, redeemed life that they now have.

They almost wish that they didn't have it. They grumble and say it would actually have been better if we'd have died in slavery. They're suggesting that life was better when they were slaves.

Paul is saying to the judge, in recalling that story, Don't be like God's people in the wilderness. Who complained of what a rescued life meant for them.

You see, when we grumble as redeemed followers of Jesus, What it really demonstrates is that with the aspects of our lives, It shows a level of discontentment with the life that God has given us.

See, what happens when you grumble internally on a heart level is this. And we all have this. We all have an imagined life where things go your way.

[13 : 15] And that goes to the very small details of life where we just expect something. And then we have our actual life, our real life, the way things actually are.

And the two pretty much don't align. Occasionally they will. But pretty much our imagined life and our actual life don't align.

And what happens is the further the imagined life and the actual life are from one another, The bigger the gap gets, the more we grumble. You see, when we grumble, it's actually a complaint against us.

Because our lives are given to us by him. And in grumbling, what we're saying is that we know better how to run our lives than he does. And that he better start making our real lives more like our imagined ones.

That we actually know how to run his world better than he does. The danger is that when we then attempt, because what we do is, We attempt to bring our actual life to our imagined life.

[14 : 26] Because we think that we have the power to do that. And the thing we do, and the thing we do to fill that gap, Is actually what idolatry is. It's the thing that we do to make our life different to what God has given us.

What do you grumble at? Do you grumble when your kids make a mess of the house just before you have guests arriving? Your actual life and your imagined life.

Do you moan about being too busy? Your actual life, your imagined life. And what do you do to close the gap between them? Do you moan about your spouse?

Do you moan about your family? Do you moan about your job? I don't know. We all moan. I love them all. So this is actually speaking straight to my heart.

Because I know. God knows what he's doing with my life. And he knows what he's doing with your life. You can trust him. And even when it feels hard, you can still trust him.

[15 : 30] Now, I do need to take a look at the policy. Because what I want to say is, that doesn't mean that we can't complain to him about the difficulty. He wants us to do that.

We're told in the Psalms, there's lots of times when David is going through difficult times. Sometimes he brings his complaints to God. But there is a difference between bringing your complaints to him and just having a general moan to everybody else about what God is doing.

There is a difference. It's right to, when we go through difficulty and hardship, to feel that difficulty and hardship and talk about it in a way that honours God but draws near to him in prayer.

That is different from grumbling. Even when it's hard, you can trust him. And even when it doesn't, you go your way. That's okay. He's got this. The imagined life that you compare with your actual life with all the time.

Can I just say, and this sounds quite hip, just kill it. Just kill your imagined life. Because you don't have an imagined life. You've only got your actual one.

[16 : 41] Okay. So you've got the root of obedience, the difficulty of obedience. You've got the attractiveness of obedience. So if we're not to grumble, there's lots of reasons why. Here, the reason Paul gives are reasons as to why followers of Jesus shouldn't do that.

Why? An additional reason, besides the fact that it doesn't honour God, why should we be obedient to that instruction? The reason he gives is because it's attractive to the world. Look with me, verse 15.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing. And here it is, verse 15. So that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. When you don't grumble or argue, even when life is difficult, it stands in complete contrast to the world.

Towards the end of verse 15, here's what he says. Then, when you don't do that, then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

A couple of weeks ago, I don't know if you saw the northern lights. It was over most of the UK. I missed it. I woke up Saturday morning and looked on the news and was absolutely gutted.

[17 : 46] I was told it was going to be on Saturday night. Went outside. It was nowhere to be seen. So, I had a little grumble. But I saw it the next day on the news. I was gutted. But, having said that, if you do go out in the night sky, you go out, you see amazing constellations.

The northern lights. It's amazing. If you see that, you go outside, you capture it. I will shout, Annabelle, come and see this. Come and look outside. It's amazing. Just look at what we can see.

It's beautiful, like a painting. When we live with humble obedience, not grumbling, when we hold firm to God's word of life, in those moments, we are living like children of God that resemble our Father in heaven.

And we shine in the world. You see, obedience, that kind of obedience when we don't grumble, when we make our complaints and difficulty to God, when people notice that because it is so different.

And it draws people to Him. And the more of us do that will have a greater impact. We will be, as a church, like a beautiful constellation.

[18 : 58] Where people will see us and say, come and see this. Look at these people. Look at these people and how brightly they shine. It is different to the world.

Look how much Jesus has made a difference in their lives. They're going through such hardship and difficulty. Yet, everybody has one. I know someone in that village where I grew up.

And it's one of those people where just, they never, they never complain. It doesn't matter what's going on. They never seem to grumble. They're always there, caring for somebody else. Even in the midst of their own struggles.

Everybody knows someone like that. And it's beautiful to see. Come and see how they shine. Where does that light come from? They will ask.

It comes from Jesus Christ, is the answer. The light of the world. So, you have the root. The difficulty.

[19 : 53] The attractiveness. And then finally, the fruit. Obedience is fruit. It is the fruit of the gospel. And it demonstrates fruit from Paul's ministry. I've talked earlier about the roots of a tree.

Now, I don't know if you're into gardening. Again, it's something I'm not great at. I bet with outdoor plants and flowers. Indoor plants, I just kill. There was one time. A few years ago, I grew some potatoes.

I planted them in February. This is a long time ago. I planted them in February, March time. I don't know if you've ever done that. But it does take time and effort. I had to make sure regularly that they were watered and looked after.

If you're into that sort of thing, and you like to do that, what do you have to do if there's not much rain? You have to give them love and attention and water them to make sure they grow. So, time came round to late August, I think it was, pulled the plants up to find hundreds of little new potatoes.

If you've ever done that, and you'll know what I'm talking about, it's a great feeling. It's a great feeling to see the fruit of your labour, to see the months of effort you've gone into, something that you can now put on your plate.

[21 : 02] And for some reason, those potatoes, if you grow them yourself, they always taste better than the ones that you buy in the shop. And it's even more when you think back to the effort that you've put in.

Paul has tended to this little church. He planted this church, Acts 16. When it was just a little seedling, just a tiny shoe, and he's watched it grow. Grown in number, but grown in maturity, so that they have the mindset of Christ, so that they take on this good news mindset.

That's what Paul wants. Look with me at the end of verse 16. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ, that I did not go on labour in pain.

You see, when Christ returns, what he wants, is to see that all the months of tending and nurturing, ministering to the Philippian church, has not been for nothing. That his ministry has resulted in healthy gospel, good news through, and what he's saying is, so far I can see that in you.

And I am glad. And I rejoice with you all. And then he says, so you too should be glad and rejoice with me. Whenever there is gospel fruit, there is joy.

[22 : 12] The reason there is joy in obedience is because it means that if there's obedience, it means the gospel is advancing. It means he's advancing in people's hearts, and if it's advancing in people's hearts, it means that Jesus is being magnified.

In the lives of believers, and probably in the hearts of, in the lives of those outside the church, as they hear about it, Jesus is being made bigger in the hearts of many.

Paul has joy when he sees obedience. And he says, you should have joy in me because of my obedience. That they should have a mutual joy in one another because they're both committed to the gospel.

Come what may, as they suffer for Christ. Let us rejoice in what God is doing. We're to be a joyful people. And one of the joys, as we take this from Paul, is what one of the joys should be is we see obedience in one another to Jesus Christ.

Come what may. In a sense, we're to be everybody else's cheerleader. That we rejoice when we see people obeying Christ, and they rejoice when we see us doing it.

[23 : 24] And so keep shining. Keep shining for Jesus. Keep being obedient. Keep looking for ways to demonstrate that he's changed you. Just as a reminder, obedience is not the way that you get into the family of God.

But it is a reflection that you are in it. It's an assurance that you, as you obey Jesus, that you are in it. To get in comes through Jesus Christ alone, his obedience that you could never fulfill as he dies on the cross and takes all your sins on his shoulders, like a funnel on his head, where a big dirty jug of water of your sin and the sins of all God's people is poured out on his head like a funnel that covers him, and he takes it all away.

That's how you get into the family of God, as he takes it away. But your obedience, it actually is an assurance to you that you belong to the family. So keep shining.

Keep being obedient. Keep looking for ways to demonstrate that you've changed. Put your imagined life to death. You'll be thankful for your actual life. Let's pray.

Almighty God, we do praise you for what you've done. We thank you that you were obedient to death on a cross, that you took all our sins away, that you brought us into the fold, the family of God.

[24 : 56] And we now, Lord, we want to obey you. We pray that you'd give us a joy in our obedience to you. We do it in response to the fact that you've saved us. And we pray that you'd give us joy in our own obedience, but in the obedience that we see of others when they do as you commanded.

We thank you that you are the room. You are the source of every good work that we do. And so if we belong to you, then good fruit will definitely come. We pray that when it's difficult, we pray that you'd continue us and help us.

Help us to not grumble. Help us to be thankful for our lives and to put to death our imagined life and live the actual life that you've given us with great thankfulness for everything that you have given to us.

We pray that you would do that and that you'd motivate us and encourage us because it's so attractive to a watching world. And so we have great joy in you and the gospel and what you're doing in each of us.

We pray for this and pray for your blessing upon each of us. In Jesus' name. Amen.