

Advent 4

Series: Where Is God When It Hurts

Final Installment: Our Obedience in Suffering

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(Hebrews 5:6-8; Philippians 2:8; Romans 6:16)

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Introduction

⁶ As *He* also says in another place: “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek”; ⁷ who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸ though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:6-8).

In 1989, Marla Maples gained celebrity status through her relationship with Donald Trump. Of her affair she said, “I was never embarrassed because I never felt I did anything wrong.” Such words are a far cry from the ones she used to read every night as a teenager. She called the Bible her favorite book and loved to read the Ten Commandments. Before Trump divorced Ivana to marry her, Maples told an interviewer, “As a girl I picked up the Bible and read ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not fornicate.’ But after my

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parents' divorce, I learned you can't take the Bible literally and be happy." The former Mrs. Trump embraced a commonly held myth that denies any connection between Biblical obedience and true happiness. In John 15:11, Jesus denounced this myth by reminding his disciples that obedience to Scripture is what makes our joy "complete."

"**OBEY**" is a dirty word to many in our culture, but one reveals his true God by what he does. The prophet Samuel said to Saul that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Samuel 15:23), and witchcraft was idolatry, using magic to control one's destiny rather than trusting in the Lord.

Today each person wants to be his own god, to be "true to himself," which means do your own thing and invent your own ethic. We want to put conditions on obedience, which means we might obey if things go our way.

A friend often told me about the problems he had getting his son to clean his room now. The son would always agree to tidy up, but then wouldn't follow through. After high school the young man joined the Marine Corps. When he came home for leave after basic training, his father asked him what he had learned in the service.

"Dad," he said. "I learned what 'now' means."

So why don't we obey God better? Oswald Chambers said that the root of all sin is the suspicion that God is not good. Isn't it true that somehow we have a generation who think that God is not good, that sin is attractive, and that God is a kill joy. The cost of obedience is nothing compared with the cost of disobedience.

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I. Why Did Christ Obey?

“Arise, let us go.” By these words he declares that, after having prayed, he was furnished with new arms. He had formerly, indeed, been sufficiently voluntary as to dying; but, when he came to the point, he had a hard struggle with the weakness of the flesh, so that he would willingly have withdrawn from dying, provided that he had been permitted to do so with the good-will of his Father. He, therefore, obtained by prayers and tears (Heb 5:7) new strength from heaven; not that he ever hesitated through want of strength, but because under the weakness of the flesh, which he had voluntarily undertaken, he wished to labor anxiously, and with painful and difficult exertion, to gain a victory for us in his own person. But now, when the trembling is allayed, and the fear is subdued, that he may again present a voluntary sacrifice to the Father, he not only does not retire or conceal himself, but cheerfully advances to death. (John Calvin on Hebrews 5:7)

Therefore, let us not think that because the Lord Christ offered perfect obedience that it was always easy.

But why would Christ sound like He was full of doubt and having second thoughts on going to the cross? The early father Chrysostom has well stated:

Tell me now, did He pray the Father that He might be saved from death? And was it for this cause that He was “exceeding sorrowful, and said, If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me”? (Matt 26:38; Matt 26:39). Yet He nowhere prayed the Father concerning His resurrection, but on the contrary He openly declares, “Destroy this temple

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and within three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19) And, "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. No man taketh it from Me, I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). What then is it; why did He pray? (And again He said, "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death. And they shall deliver Him to the Gentiles, to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him; and the third day He shall rise again" (Matt 20:18-19), and said not, "My Father shall raise Me up again." How then did He pray concerning this? But for whom did He pray? For those who believed on Him.

"He learned," he saith, to obey God. Here again he shows **how great is the gain of sufferings.** "And having been made perfect," he says, "He became the Author of salvation to them that obey Him." But if He, being the Son, gained obedience from His sufferings, much more shall we.

Before we look at our obedience in trials, let us ask why did Christ obey? He was the lawgiver in the flesh; indeed, He was above the law, so what was the point? There are several points.

First, one man, the first Adam, lost creation and incurred the curse, so another Man, the Last Adam, obeyed to remove the curse:

¹⁸ Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one

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Man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).

Second, He obeyed for us, weaving a coat of righteousness for each of us.

Is not Christ Israel embodied, our Israel, our circumcision, our baptism? In our own Litany in the BCP it is put this way:

By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and Circumcision; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation,

Good Lord, deliver us.

By thine Agony and Bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and by the Coming of the Holy Ghost,

Good Lord, deliver us.

In all time of our tribulation; in all time of our prosperity; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment,

Good Lord, deliver us.

But Hebrews 2:10 in the Greek seems clear to me where the aorist participle ("bringing") is simultaneously with the aorist infinitive ("make perfect"), which in turn means that during the Lord's life on earth, **as He was being perfected, matured as a human (see Luke 2:52) He was also, by that process and through suffering, "bringing many sons to glory."** In other words, His obedience and suffering counted

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for us, which means that it was not just His death on the Cross that saved us but also His whole life.

Third, Christ obeyed as our perfect example.

²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²² "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Isaiah said:

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him (Isaiah 53:3).

We are certainly no better. If it was necessary for Him, the perfect Man, to go through such trials and sufferings to learn obedience, it is infinitely more so for us. We just do not take God seriously until something happens. **In trials we seek His face; in ease we forget Him.**

I recall growing up how often I did not take my mother seriously until I got a good whipping. I learned obedience by the things I suffered!

II. Why Do We Obey?

People often give up hope because they don't see purpose in their sufferings. There is nothing in the entire world more important than obedience to godly authority. If we came from molecules in motion and all the universe is just chance, then despair would be the proper response to pain and hurt; but because God is in charge, Christians always have meaning, and obedience to His commands is a large part of that.

If the Lord Christ "learned obedience by the things He suffered," how much more do we?! It was not that Christ in His humanity was sinful and had to learn how to overcome temptations and do better, but He was perfect all along, even in that humanity. Still, He learned to obey in the midst of great angst. Yet over time, as He expressed His humanity, He matured, learned to appreciate what it meant to obey when the circumstances were difficult. Recall even as a Child:

And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:40, 52).

Therefore, there is one thing we all must seek in every trial or affliction, and we must pursue it as one of the reasons for the problems we are in: **obedience**. "No pain, no gain," which is true spiritually as well as in other matters.

In facing the Cross in the garden, Christ learned trust. He was facing death, and Hebrews tells us:

in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears

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to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear (Hebrews 5:7).

What was particularly stressful for Christ was that no one had ever been raised from the dead never to die again. He Himself had raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11, but Lazarus died again. Now Jesus had told people that He would rise from the dead. Everything that He had come for and had done during His ministry was contingent on something that had never happened before: bodily resurrection. The public shame of crucifixion, the bodily pain He would endure, the angst of the moment, all came upon Him in the garden and then on the cross. In this internal struggle, He never hesitated to obey the Father, but it was still a huge grief to face death with the sins of the world imputed to Him, to die under such a curse, to say those awful words, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?"

No doubt this consternation was true His entire life, but especially in the garden. The Gospels do not record that He prayed with "vehement cries and tears," yet we know the agony of soul was so intense that He perspired drops of blood, a real medical condition for those in such tremendous stress. I think that Mel Gibson captured this scene in the *Passion of the Christ* where Christ was in great agony of soul in the garden with the devil lurking in the background. Then once the Lord resolved the matter, praying not His will but the Father's will be done, He confidently got up and stomped a snake that was symbolic of the devil. He crushed its head. Then the text says that an angel came and ministered to Him (Luke 22:43), giving Him strength.

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Moreover, we will feel the intensity of the trials just like Jesus did:

Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour (John 12:27).

³³ And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. ³⁴ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch." ³⁵ He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. ³⁶ And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:33-36).

It is amazing that most people, even Christians, don't know what life is about, or at least we Christians don't often live like it. We think of kids going to college, of money to travel with in retirement, of where we'll retire. But as good as these things are in themselves, they are not God's priorities. "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

God is concerned about holiness of life, not that we sail to heaven on a bed of roses with a lot of toys. Once we're home, then we will have everlasting righteousness and peace, but not so in this life.

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a **moment**, is working for us a far more exceeding *and*

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eternal weight of **glory**,¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

So *when, not if*, the trials come, we must look for ways to repent, for ways to obey, to trust in His gracious providence. Maybe we caused our trials, or maybe we didn't, but we should always learn obedience by the things we suffer.

So if we lose a job, we must seek His face, trust His grace, and use what means we have available to look for a job. We must realize that Jesus obeyed the Father even when He was without in the desert and the devil came to tempt Him.

If we go through a divorce, we must "trust and obey, for there's no other way" to please God. Some good will come out of it, but we must obey Him, learn what we can from the situation, not give up on marriage, for that may be not trusting Him to provide a good spouse.

If we lost a loved one, we must realize that the Father gave His only Son, and understand the pain they went through. We must not rail against God but accept it as from Him.

If we messed up by sinning, especially here we must repent, renew our obedience, and learn to trust the goodness of God.

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Conclusion

Everyone without exception obeys someone. As Bob Dylan used to sing,

You may be an ambassador to England or France,
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance,
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world,
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls
But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord,
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered. God the Son served God the Father, and He was thereby serving us:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Life is about glorying the Triune God, learning to trust and obey Him in all things. Let us remember the hymn we sang several Sundays ago:

Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy
in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

AMEN.