

SERVING AND GOD'S WILL

Today's reading from Philippians and Matthew can make us pause for a moment and think about where we are going in life, what are we doing and why? Am I content with it all? Are we here "to just take up space" or to "just survive through it"?

Our life is meant to have purpose and direction. As a disciple both our purpose and direction in life should come out of our deep beliefs. These beliefs give us the desire to walk in obedience to god and know his will for us and to serve others.

Is knowing how to walk in obedience to God and knowing his will for us a mystery hidden from us? No, we have guidance on obedience. We have been given the Ten Commandments, and in the New Testament we are given two more Commandments by Jesus himself.

These alone are quite enough on our platter to digest and follow in our daily lives. Knowing god's will for our lives, we have been given instruction on that too. If you look in the Bible **we will** find answers!!!! Just think how generous and gracious our god is that he shows us the way to a meaningful life. It is not magically dropped on us nor is it somehow gotten by osmosis!

In Matthew 6 living the life as a disciple we gain that which will not rust, the moths eat or thieves break in and steal. Living a life of obedience brings integrity, a clear conscience, and much more, like the joy of serving others--but not a life that is guaranteed without struggle or trial. Obedience is an element that has been laid out in stone, quite literally.

Being in God's will for our life is not as clear because it is something you must find and know for yourself and how it applies to you. Others can not find it for you! Maybe they can help you but you must find it! That is why it is important to look into the guiding principles and benefits of God's will for your life. And I truly believe the only place to find such guidance is in the Bible. After all why wouldn't we look there if we are as we claim we are followers of Christ and believe in the grace of God, and the power and help of the Holy Spirit?

In today's reading the story shows us a clear picture of the choices of the two sons. Now their words spoken did not clearly represent their actions, and isn't that really what Christianity comes down to when we remove all the trappings man has added onto it? **Do our actions match our words?** People are **always, always** looking for actions to match up with a person's words. We can look throughout history and find examples of actions where not living up to the words spoken were the root cause of many, many negative things.

This parable points to two types of people we find today in our world. The first are people who profess much better than their practice or actions, promising anything and demonstrating false

piety and fidelity to their faith. Their practice is far behind their professing. The second type person whose practice is far better than their professing--does a lot secretly. These people many times live a life more Christian than Christians! Neither type of these people are to be admired. The person that matches words with actions, or performance and not promises should be our model.

Obedience and being in the will of God will bring purpose and direction to our life. In addition a product of obedience and being in His will is the desire to serve others. Just like we never stop learning, we can likely admit we could all use more discipline in certain areas of our life.

Obedying God seems to be easy enough with all there is for us to read and learn, but impossible at the same time - without the grace of God! The starting point of obedience to god and walking in his will must be, as the psalms and proverbs declare the respect for the Lord is the beginning of understanding and wisdom.

If we look back at the parable neither son likely held any respect for their father based on their actions. One thing we do not know from this story was the heart of each son only their actions.

Remember just last week the message from Matthew was clear that attitude, that which comes from the heart is a huge factor in determining our actions. However, when we cast off the old life and are renewed our hearts are changed. Actions change too. It is not our basic human nature to obey and serve. If there is any mystery, it is the mystery of transformation of an individual when they turn to God. Does it happen overnight? No, I believe you can talk with any person in this church and they will tell you they are a work in progress!

To obey God or another person, we must trust. Each Communion Sunday when we confess the Apostles' Creed aren't we really saying from the heart that yes, God I believe, I trust in you and these words I am confessing! Our faith in God can be interchanged with our trust in God. Has God not been faithful to Centennial? Giving to us a gift of ministry, brought us through hard times as a church and as individuals members? When we have been trusting, obeying God, He has helped us with through trials, temptations, and answered prayers.

Would we even speak a word of prayer if we did not have faith and trust in God? When we obey and trust God we will gather and sing praises to Him and are thankful with a heart of gratitude. Sunday morning worship is not something to just get through. For many years it was the highlight of the day – Sunday morning worship. Yes, times have changed, God hasn't, and He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Worship is an opportunity to give back because of the abundance he has given us! Had a rough week? Well, you made it through and you are here!! I can assure you there are certainly people who had a rougher week and they may be sitting right next to you!!!

Along with obeying God comes obeying parents, no matter what age they are! We must all recall that fifth Commandment that God gave us. Respecting parents lasts a lifetime and as the Bible states, parents are accountable to God as stewards of their children, going both ways. With obeying God comes living like a disciple of the faith. We are not to live our life as others do because God has called us out of the love and grace God continues to give us that love and grace each and every day.

As I mentioned earlier when we are obedient and discover His will for our lives, we realize the love He has for us and we will share that love in serving others. After all we are His visible presence on this earth!!! What others see in us – will it drive people away or bring them closer to us and hopefully to God?

Now if we are obedient then we are opening to the call of God in our lives. Being in His will is a matter of timing. It is listening to that voice inside, the Holy Spirit that gives us the confidence to know we can discern that assurance, but it can quickly disappear and be replaced with doubt. Now a caution here, and I have talked with others and found this to be true– because there are forces that want to thwart God's plans. Remember in Daniel 10 how spiritual forces held back help from Daniel.

When we are obedient and have faith and trust in God, He does strengthen us just as promised in 2 Chronicles 16. It really is not some huge mystery to be in God's will if we are obedient to His call on our life. Here are just a few verses that tells us in clear terms God's will for our lives...

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says "...rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus". In Micah 6:8 "...He has showed you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God".

There are many other verses in both the Old and New Testament giving us direction on what is God's will for us. All we have to do is talk to God and that communicating with Him is something we are all familiar with – it is called prayer. Somehow we have made prayer this thing that only the pastor or great orator can do. **Nonsense** that is a trapping man has put on communicating with God. I think some of the most meaningful prayers are short, from the heart, and many times have come out of the mouths of children.

The same can be said about God's will for you. If we devote time to His word and talk to Him then we will know God's will for our life. In Jeremiah 6 - "this is what the Lord says; 'stand at the crossroads and look... Ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'" You cannot readily determine the will of God for your life outside of having your heart opened through prayer, the study of God's word and obedience to it. And, if you are outside the will of God, you will find yourself without peace in your life.

Okay, so I am obedient and I am in God's will for my life, so then what? There are numerous blessings that be can found in the Bible. One place is in the Psalms, and especially Psalm 119. When we are obedient then we have integrity and hold fast to that which is pure and true. When we hold God's word in our hearts our minds can be protected from that which is not good for us. We can receive strength and comfort in tough times from the word of God. At the same time it can give us hope in troubles times.

Obedience brings an assurance of forgiveness and assurance of our salvation with the faith and trust we put in Him. When we are obedient and walk in His will, prayer is answered and many here can attest to that fact. As we walk in God's will, He does not leave us alone but provides guidance through the Holy Spirit. If and when we do disobey, the grace of God leads us back and set us on the right path.

Numerous verses tell us that when we dwell on the word of God we can become wise and be knowledgeable. Obedience lights the path so we can discern that which is not good. The verse "your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" is very comforting. When we retain His word in our hearts we can find practical use of it through the good times and the bad. Believe it or not obedience brings joy and happiness. I can remember when I disobeyed my parents all the sorrow I caused or went through myself.

Right along with obedience, comes peace and stability. Look closely at the people who always seem to be going from crisis to crisis or are in turmoil all the time. You may find a common thread, one of disobedience, no respect for authority or morally bankrupt.

There are blessings that come from obedience, being in God's will, and serving others. One blessing that many times is overlooked is – in the second half of the Fifth Commandment – "that your days may be long". In today's parable the two sons did not display obedience, and did not honor their father's request. They knew all the Ten Commandments. They were not really in God's will after all. The parable also tells us that no matter what we have done in the past, future actions have more power to shape our lives.

The disciples followed Jesus and shared in the kingdom of God. God's love, grace, and forgiveness are there for each one of us.

In closing here an interesting short story....

When Edward VI, the king of England in the 16th century, attended a worship service, he stood while the word of God was read. He took notes during this time and later studied them with great care. Through the week he earnestly tried to apply them to his life. That's the kind of serious-minded response to truth the Apostle James wrote about. A single revealed fact cherished in the heart and acted upon is more vital to our growth than a head filled with lofty ideas about God.

One step forward in obedience is worth years of study about it. Amen and amen.