

Obedience

by John Gowans

John Gowans' sermon emphasizes that true love for Christ is demonstrated through total obedience to His commands, which is essential for spiritual fulfillment and effective leadership in the Salvation Army.

Duration: 20:34

Scripture: John 14:15-21, John 14:23-24, John 14:26, John 14:28, John 14:31

Topics: "Following Christ", "True Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his experience living in Australia and observes that despite efforts to distance themselves from their British heritage, Australians still possess a sense of resilience and stoicism. The speaker then urges the audience to 'unwrap Christmas' by moving beyond the traditional image of Christ in the cradle and embracing the true meaning of the holiday. He emphasizes the importance of not just calling oneself a Christian, but actually living out the teachings of Jesus. The speaker concludes by highlighting the transformative power of following Christ's teachings and warns against building one's life on a weak foundation.

Transcript

I want to read to you some verses from St. John's Gospel. Jesus is speaking and he says, If you love me, you'll obey my commands. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another to be your advocate, who will be with you forever, the Spirit of truth.

The world can't receive him because the world neither sees nor knows him, but you know him because he dwells with you and is in you. I will not leave you bereft, I'm coming back to you. In a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me because I live, you too will live.

Then you will know that I'm in the Father and you in me and I in you. The man who receives my commands and obeys them, he it is who loves me. The obedient prove their love for Christ.

You see, obedience is the heart of the Gospel. It is the basic brick, the foundation stone of every Christian structure. It is the basic brick, the foundation stone, our successful life of service as a Salvation Army officer.

Obedience is the basis. Without that basis, nothing of any lasting good can be achieved or constructed. How dare I say that? I say it on the authority of Jesus, who said, anyone who hears these words of mine

and doeth them not is like a fool who built on sand.

But anyone who hears what I say and does what I say is a wise man. He builds on rock and the wind can blow and the floods can rise and the rain can beat upon that house and it will not fall because it is founded upon the rock of obedience. You do what I tell you and you're sound as a rock, says Jesus.

Without obedience, nothing is of any true value. Everything of a Christian's life is fake unless there is obedience at the bottom of it. Jesus was quite clear about it.

In fact, one of the most awful things he ever said, and it makes my flesh creep to even repeat the words that he said. You can almost detect the disappointment, the disillusionment of Jesus when he said to some of his disciples when he was in the flesh, why, listen to me, why do you go on calling me Lord, Lord, when you don't do what I ask? What is this person called a Christian who says Lord, Lord, and doesn't do what the Lord suggests? Where is this thing called a Salvationist who says Majesty, Majesty, and doesn't do what the Lord says? It's a fake, it's false, it's insulting to the Almighty to call him Master and then to disobey him, no, the basis of all spiritual strength is obedience. Those who obey me love me, said Jesus, I know the ones that love me.

It's not those that sing the loudest, it's not those that protest the most, it's not those that make a song and dance about being one of my disciples, I know the ones that love me, they do what I suggest. To say I call you Master and not to obey you is blasphemy of the worst kind. Now this kind of obedience that is the basis of all successful spiritual life can't be a selective obedience.

You know part of the problem of modern Christianity, the fake kind, is that it likes to be selective. And the devil has had a party with this business about spiritual gifts because people have misinterpreted the words of scripture about spiritual gifts to mean that if you haven't got a gift for something you don't have to do it. That's rubbish, that's rubbish.

An officer said to me, I don't have a gift for visitation. I said, too bad, you'll have to work harder on it then, won't you? You can't be selective in your obedience, you take the packet as the French say. You can't pick and choose, you don't look in the chocolate box and say, oh I like this one but I don't like that one.

When you give your obedience to God, it is carte blanche, it is a blank check. You obey totally and without question. It is not a selective obedience.

This business of I'll do this but I don't like doing that. I'll be this kind of salvationist but that part of being a salvationist I'm not interested in. I'll be this kind of Christian and I like that about it.

Oh I love to sing but when it comes to trying to win somebody for Christ and speak personally to someone about their soul, well I'm a bit shy. But I haven't got a gift for that. Oh no, you can't be selective in your obedience.

Well, Jonah tried to be selective, didn't he? He said, I'll go anywhere Lord, but never. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy. I know one or two Salvation Army officers who said to me, I'll go anywhere but the ex-commissioner.

Well, every officer here has gone to Nineveh sometime, haven't you? I won't ask for a show of hands, perhaps you wouldn't like, I'll raise mine. I've done a couple of Nineveh's in my time. Places I'd rather not have gone, places I'd rather not have been.

Places I didn't think were right for me. But I'll tell you, the Salvation Army cannot send a servant of God where God can't use him. And we take the package.

We can't be selective in our obedience and sometimes, as with Jonah, our most successful work is done in our Nineveh's. We can't be selective about it. I want to serve God, says some young person, but I don't want to be an officer.

Supposing God wants you to be an officer, you can't say, Master, Master, but not officer-ship. No. I wonder if, uh, we'll ask Spence, please, to come and... You see that banner over there, the yellow one, it says Master on it.

You bring it out. Friends, I'm just wanting to underline that, stand in the middle there, so we can see the banner. That's it, the light's falling on it perfectly there.

Master means obedience. And any Christian that names the name of Christ, has him as saviour and as master. Jesus said to his disciples, You call me Master and Lord, and you're quite right, I am your Master and your Lord.

There's no getting around it. Obedience is the basis. Worship without obedience is pure words.

Worship without willingness is an empty sound. Worship without obedience is a bad smell in the nostrils of God. You want fulfillment, you want successful living, you want spiritual usefulness, you get it by obedience.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and he said, I want life with a capital L, I want a satisfying life, I want a fulfilling life that really fulfills all my nature, all my character, all my capacity. I want life with a capital L. And Jesus said, that's fine, keep the commandments. And the young man said, I've kept those commandments since I was a kid, but there's still something missing.

Oh, I know what's missing, says Jesus, the element of obedience. Let's see if you've got the element of obedience. Go home and sell what you've got and give it away to the poor and come and follow me.

And the rich man's face fell. He wanted fulfillment without obedience. And so he kept his wealth and lost his way.

And many Christians do the same. Their Christianity is superficial, it's dissatisfying, it's not good, it's not tasteful, it's not effervescent, it's not vibrant. And they say, what's the matter with me that my Christianity is so puerile, so banal, so plain, so tasteless, and the real reason is there's a lack of obedience somewhere.

The people who are obedient to Jesus are vitally alive and totally satisfied in their inmost souls and theirs is the life of fulfillment. I congratulate these faithful intercessors for their obedience. I hope they're clever, but they need to be obedient.

I hope they're strong, but they need to be obedient. I hope they're gifted, but they need to be obedient. Because God can do miracles with the obedient who may not be strong or clever.

Obedience is the basis. And part of the sickness of the church of our day is that they want fulfillment and spiritual strength without the requirement of obedience. Now I've no doubt at all, in this huge congregation, I'm only sorry that some of you are so far away I can hardly see you, but in this huge congregation, up the ranch there, along the back roads there, there are people who call themselves Christians.

There are people who call Jesus Christ Master, and he has called you to be a leader in the Salvation Army. Now please do not, I insist, do not dare go home and stand up in your core and sing Majesty whilst you disobey the calling of Christ. Don't have the gall.

Don't have the gall. The call of Christ is not a dictatorial call, a do this or be damned. The call of Christ is an offer of an adventurous and fulfilling and satisfying life.

And he invites you to say yes to it. And as he's your master, and you want to build your life on something solid, then you're going to say yes. Now this is the moment when we make a call for people who feel they are being nudged by the Holy Spirit to becoming Salvation Army officers.

Some of you will be quite young. I was extremely young when I was a candidate. Some of you will be quite mature with perhaps many years of service to the Salvation Army as a local officer perhaps.

Some of you have been in the Army all your life and some of you have only been in the Army five minutes, but you feel a conviction that your place in the Army is the place of an officer. We need you desperately. The Salvation Army needs leaders.

It needs dedicated leaders. But first of all, it needs obedient leaders. And if you are obedient to Christ, then he will make you a useful leader in his army.

But you've got to call him master, and that means you never say no, and you never say later. Remember last night's sermon? You mustn't hang about. You never say no to your master, and you never say perhaps, maybe, or later.

You say now. To be born in Sydney. But I have lived for four years in Australia, and it's changed my life dramatically, I can tell you.

It is quite funny, really. I've discovered that despite all your efforts to shake off your mixed nationality heritage, and above all, your British heritage, you haven't quite managed to break the Britishness out of you yet. In this respect, in this respect, you're like the British in the fact that you never let up.

You may be breaking your heart, but if you say, good day, mate, how are you doing? I'm fine, I'm fine. You must have had the biggest catastrophe of your life, but you never let on, you never disclose it, you keep a stiff upper lip, you never let anybody suspect what's going on underneath you. Now look at this crowd tonight, what a happy lot of people you look.

You look as if you haven't got a care in your world, but I'll tell you what, I've been a Salvation Army officer for long enough to know that in this congregation there are people who are going to have a hard job to celebrate Christmas. Oh yes. Maybe just a sprinkling here and there.

One or two people here who are going to have a hard job to celebrate Christmas. I want to wish them a happy Christmas. How are they going to have a happy Christmas? Supposing for a moment I could give you an example.

Here's a person, somewhere, I won't look at anybody, but somewhere in this congregation is somebody who this year has lost their life partner. Oh yes, somebody. Been married for 40 years and now he's dead, she's gone.

How are you going to celebrate Christmas? How can I wish you a happy Christmas? How are you going to have a happy Christmas? Somebody sitting here has seen in the year that's just passed, the breakup of their family life. The kids were separated from their mother or from their father. How are you going to have a happy Christmas? How do I have the gall to wish you a happy Christmas? Somebody here perhaps has just learned in the last month or two that they've got some sickness that's not going to get better.

How can I wish you a happy Christmas? Someone sitting here has had such a big disappointment this year that they're raw inside and they're bitter against God and against somebody else or against society. How are you going to have a happy Christmas with all that bitterness in there? I'll tell you how I can dare to wish you a happy Christmas. You will have a happy Christmas, whoever you are, provided that you unwrap Christmas now.

Unwrap Christmas and what do you find in the parcel? The Christ wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Unwrap Christmas, unwrap Christ. The trouble is that people like to keep the Christ in the cradle.

You've got to let him out of the cradle and then you'll have a happy Christmas in spite of the negative things of the past year. Let him loose, let him go, let him out of the cradle. When I was a kid, there was a kid in my class, I remember him well, his mother tried to keep him a kid.

He was still wearing blouses with flowers on when we'd gone to belts and long trousers. He was still in short trousers, his mother wanted to keep him a kid all the time. Listen, there are Christians who want to keep Christ in the cradle, they want the kid Jesus.

But unless you let him out of the cradle and into your life, he can't do you any good at all. Let him out of the cradle and into your ideas. Let him out of the cradle and into your priorities.

Let him out of the cradle, let him permeate your ambitions, your attitudes, a way of looking at things. Let him who is the Christ of wholesomeness, of health, of happiness, out of the cradle and into your life, into your thinking, into your feelings, into your emotions, into your private places of your thinking, into your hurt. Let him out of the cradle and into your hurt with his healing.

Let him out of the cradle and into that bitterness and resentment, and let him take it away. Let him out of that cradle and into your disappointments. You're disappointed with somebody, disappointed with society, disappointed with yourself.

Let him out of the cradle and into your disappointment, and he'll heal you of those hurts and turn bitterness into sweetness. That's what he came for. That's what he comes for.

That's how I dare to wish you a happy Christmas, in spite of your hurts and your arms. Whoever you are, I'm dressing at you tonight. Let Jesus out of the cradle, into your relationships, into your feelings, into your home life, into your private life.

Let him in. Let him invade your life, and then I know, I swear to you, you will have a happy Christmas. Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free from our fears and sins, release us.

Let us find our rest, our peace, our joy, our healing in thee. Happy Christmas, everyone.

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