

THE WAY OF OBEDIENCE

Good morning! Last week, when we were at camp, I started a series I'm calling "Journey to the Center of God's Will". In this series, I want to talk about five biblical characters whose examples we can emulate with regards to doing the will of God for our lives. You see, each of these characters, Moses, Ruth, Daniel, Samson, and Peter, have been chosen by God to do specific things for him. I have chosen these characters because each story from their lives present us a good pattern on how we can fulfill the will of God for our lives. For certain, there are so many other characters but these are characters who I really haven't spoke about in the past except for Moses, perhaps.

Now, when I say will of God, in this series, I'm talking about the specific will of God. You see, there's a general will of God and there's a specific will of God. The general will of God is plainly set out in Scripture. It applies to all mankind. An example is in 1 Tim. 2:4 where God's will is "for all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Obviously, this is one where everyone must begin. Then, there is Eph. 5:17-18 which says, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Another example is in 1 Thess. 5:18 which says, "...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." And there are many, many others more, like God wants us to be sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3-7), to be submissive to authorities (Rom. 13:1-6), to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31) and ultimately to be conformed to the image of God's son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-29). All these are otherwise known as the revealed will of God for each of us.

Now, the specific will of God for your life is just an extension of the general will of God for your life. And it applies to you and only you.

In Moses' case, which I tackled last week, God's will for him was to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Today, I'm going to talk about Ruth. Ruth occupies a special place in the pantheon of God's faithful people in the Bible because of the fact that she was a pagan. And yet, God used her. God directed the circumstances in her life so that his purposes for mankind could be fulfilled. This morning, I'm going to talk about how her response to God's move in her life brought her to the center of God's will.

This morning, I believe that each of us has a purpose as well. God created you for a purpose. You are not here by accident. In Philippians, for example, it says, "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 trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." (Phil. 2:12-13) And let me encourage you, because some of you may be wondering, with all the difficult circumstances you are in at present, how could there be a purpose in your life? The Bible says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

So, God is very much interested in you. He put here on this earth because he loves you and he wants to be glorified through you. He will make sure that his purpose will prevail in your life. And there's only one thing you need to do to fulfill that purpose. I talked about that last week in the life of Moses. That is, "Trust and Obey, for there's no other way". That was the last point of my message last week. This picks up where I left off. So, I've entitled this message "The Way of Obedience".

This morning, I'd like to share with you the **five characteristics of a person who is obedient.**

1. A Risk-Taker

Are you a risk-taker? Or would you rather not take risks? Some people don't take risks, because they're afraid or they're just comfortable with wherever they are or whatever their situation in life is. They don't want to step out of their comfort zone. But you see, folks, people who accomplish things for God are people who take risks. They go into the unknown because they put their trust in God. Moses took a risk when he confronted Pharaoh. Abraham took a risk when he moved from his townhome to a strange land. David took a risk when he faced Goliath. God is always prodding us to get out of our comfort zone. If you're feeling the heat right now, perhaps, God is telling, "Get moving, get moving, get out of your comfort zone". As the saying goes, "God comforts the afflicted, and he afflicts the comfortable."

For Ruth, as chapter one tells us, she faced this choice. She could either go with her mother-in-law or not. She could choose to go into the unknown in Israel or stay in her comfortable place in Moab. In chapter one, verse 16a, we see her taking a step of faith. She exclaims to her mother-in-law: "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay."

To summarize chapter one up to this point, we have Ruth, a Moabite woman, who married a Hebrew man by the name of Mahon who was living in Moab. His family came to live there when Israel had begun to experience a famine. Sometime after Mahon's family had relocated, his father, Elimelech, died leaving Mahlon's mother, Naomi, his brother Chilion and himself. The men then married Moabite women – Ruth and Orpah, but before they could have children, the two brothers died. So now we have three women, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah, in the middle of Moab. Naomi had heard that the famine in Israel was over so she decided to return to her native Bethlehem. She told Ruth and Orpah to return to their families, but Ruth insisted on accompanying Naomi to Bethlehem.

Now it would have been safer and easier for Ruth to have stayed among her own people and find a husband who could give her children than to go with Naomi, her mother-in-law, to a foreign land. First of all, the journey itself was dangerous. Secondly, she was going to a place where it would be customary for a Moabite woman to be shunned and given the lowest status – even lower than a slave. By claiming Naomi’s faith as her own and by following her back to Bethlehem, she was going into the unknown.

Why did she do that? Apparently, Ruth had become aware of the only true God, Jehovah, through her husband’s family. She had become aware of God’s will for her life. Maybe she had already become a believer at this point. Now, she wanted to continue to know God. But she was at a crossroads. Staying would mean disobeying God’s will for her life. Going would mean continuing her journey to the center of God’s will for her life. She chose the latter. It was a risk but it was a risk worth taking.

An obedient person is a risk-taker. An obedient person is also

2. Loyal.

Ruth states in verses 16b and 17 of chapter one “Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”

Ruth’s loyalty to her mother-in-law became one of the cornerstone features of this amazing story of obedience and love. Perhaps the author of Proverbs thought of his great-great-grandmother Ruth when he wrote these words in chapter 3 verses 3: (NLT) “Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart.” The Hebrew word for loyalty here is *hesed* and can be translated as love and it means loyalty to one’s covenant or commitment.

When we speak of a marriage covenant, we speak of a relationship marked by hesed – it is a deep love motivated by commitment. If we have hesed with God, we love God to the extent that we are committed to Him and to His teachings. Jesus said that if you love me, if you are loyal to me, you will obey my commandments. Loyalty and obedience go hand in hand. You cannot be loyal to a King and disobey Him. If you disobey, you are not loyal. Ruth’s display of hesed toward her mother-in-law, her display of commitment, is a mark of her obedience.

At the beginning of chapter two a new name is introduced into this narrative, Boaz. What do we know of Boaz? Well, if we look ahead a little we discover that he was a relative of some sort to Elimelech, Naomi’s deceased husband. He was also a wealthy land owner in Bethlehem (as verse 3 tells us), verse 8 tells us that he was a generous person and from the title that is given him in verse 1 of chapter 2 and from his actions displayed at the end of chapter 3 he was “a man of standing” - he was obedient to the law of the land and lived an exemplary lifestyle. Boaz was a man with integrity. A man who had sensitivity. A man who displayed honor and was honored.

Now, Naomi and Ruth, now living in Bethlehem, needed food. So, Ruth offered to Naomi in verse 2: ““Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Which brings us to the third characteristic of an obedient person.

A person of obedience seeks ways to serve! In short, that person

3. Serves.

Ruth sought ways to serve her elderly mother-in-law. She basically became a servant when she followed Naomi back to Bethlehem. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you must be a servant. Anyone who calls themselves a Christian takes on the identity of the ultimate Servant of the world. Are you willing to lay down your life?

Are you willing to become the lowest of the lowly as Christ did on the cross as he hung up there with murders and thieves? We are to take on the same attitude of Christ who took on a posture lower than a Jewish slave when he washed the disciples' dirty and calloused feet. Paul states in [Galatians 5:13](#), "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." Servanthood is a mark of obedience.

Going back to our text, we see Ruth seeking a place to glean grain, and she just happens to find herself in the field of Boaz. Was this a coincidence? Of course not – God is directing the path of Ruth for His divine purposes and her eventual enjoyment. Now it states in verse 7 that she had come in the early morning and according to verse 17 she gleaned until the evening. This brings us to the fourth characteristic of an obedient person.

4. Hard-Working.

If you are going to follow God's call – know that He will provide the gifting and skills and you need to follow His call, but He expects hard work. Again, Solomon, the great-great-grandson of Ruth might have thought of her as he wrote the words in Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." And Jesus addresses this quality in his parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The servants who were rewarded were those who did the most with the master's gifts. The servant who did nothing, was rewarded with nothing. Following the call of God requires work and the investment of the gifts which He has promised. A person of obedience is a person who understands hard work and does it joyfully knowing their reward is in heaven.

Going back to the second chapter of Ruth we see that Boaz takes notice of this woman gleaning in his fields and asks his servant in verse 5 "Who does that young woman belong to?"

When he finds out who she is, he approaches her and grants her permission to gather the same amount of grain which his servants are gleaning. Talk about a huge blessing! Ruth came out only looking for crumbs and she's going home with food in her belly, according to verse 14, and her hands full.

Ruth is amazed by his generosity and asks "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" And Boaz replies, and I summarize, "Your reputation precedes you!"

You see, word had gotten around about Ruth and her loyalty and servanthood. Boaz basically states "Woman – you are amazing – that a foreigner would take such good care of a person who is not even blood related is beyond me. May you be blessed!" Ruth's reputation was beyond reproach and I believe that this is a quality in which Boaz found to be very attractive.

Did Naomi pick up on what was happening here? Of course, she did – and she encouraged what she hoped would be a strong relationship between Ruth and Boaz. In verse 22 Naomi told Ruth that "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else's field you might be harmed." She was concerned for Ruth's safety, but even more concerned was Naomi for her daughter's future well-being and she could sense, from the way Boaz was treating Ruth, that there may be something more here than just Boaz being nice to her.

It makes me smile because here was a wise and old lady playing match-maker and in chapter three we see Naomi making more of an effort in getting this relationship moving in the right direction. She knew where Boaz would be and told Ruth exactly what to do – she was to go to Boaz in the darkness of night while he was sleeping, uncover his feet and lay down at his feet.

So, ladies – was this what you did to get your husband's attention that it was time to pop the question? Did you go to his bed and uncover his feet and think,

“OK, I’ve uncovered your feet, so you can pop the question now.” Of course, you didn’t – what Ruth did represents a cultural idiom - we need to figure out through the text and by studying the culture what this means. When Ruth uncovered Boaz’s feet and asked him to cover her she was essentially saying to him – “I submit myself to you.” In Hebrew culture if a woman uncovers a man’s feet and he then takes the blanket and covers the woman, it is a sign of marriage and of protection. Once the blanket covers the woman, she becomes his fiancé or even wife – it is the sign of his commitment to marry her.

Now why does she think Boaz would want to marry her? She is after all a Gentile. In Hebrew culture Boaz was what you would call Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer. According to law and custom, the kinsmen-redeemer must REDEEM the land, property and family of his own blood. Putting it into context of today’s culture, let’s say I have a brother and my brother dies and leaves behind him a wife and a house and whatever else – debt, savings, anything that has been done in his name. If I am not married and my brother never had children, it is my job to REDEEM his namesake. What does it mean to REDEEM his namesake? It simply means this – I become the owner of his house, his car and I marry his wife so that his name would continue through the children I would bear with his wife. As kinsman-redeemer, Boaz is being asked to carry on the name of the family of Elimelech so that the land which was Elimelech’s may remain in his family for future generations. Property was a precious commodity. It determined how a person lived and died.

Now here’s the thing – Boaz was not the true kinsman-redeemer to Ruth. Only the brother had a legal responsibility to marry his deceased brother’s wife. Boaz, not being a brother, had no obligation, but he took Ruth as his wife for reasons other than duty – Ruth and Boaz shared true admiration and love with each other.

This whole act, this whole way in which Ruth went about asking Boaz to redeem her, shows the integrity of Ruth. By uncovering his feet, she gives him the opportunity to accept or reject her. And the fact that she goes to him at night allows Boaz the opportunity to say no without public embarrassment being brought to his name. Ruth's desire from the beginning is to honor Boaz.

So, a person of obedience honors their elders or superiors – which is the fifth characteristic.

5. Respects Elders.

God places a high priority on respecting or honoring those who have more years and more wisdom. [Leviticus 19:32](#) states: ‘Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.’ In other words, if you truly believe God and truly love God, then you will honor and respect those who are elders. [Proverbs 23:22](#) asks us to ‘Listen to your father, who gave you life and do not despise your mother when she is old.’ And [1 Peter 5:5](#) asks ‘In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.’ Finally, Paul tells Titus in 3:1, ‘Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.’

In Japanese culture, elders are highly respected by the younger generations. It is customary to give a slight bow when meeting a peer, but when you meet an elder, the bow is to be lower, signifying a deeper respect for the elder. And for Filipinos, we kiss the hands of our elders. Well, we don't really kiss. We place the back of their hand against our forehead.

Now people don't bow or kiss the hand in America, but are we bowing or kissing the hand with our hearts, with our words, with our actions? Are we doing a good enough job in our lives of respecting those who are older and wiser than us?

Are we going to great lengths to give honor to the ones whom God has honored with long life? Ruth respected Boaz enough to honor him by protecting his reputation. Through her actions you can see Ruth's deep respect for her elders.

Now notice that Boaz does not grant her request to be covered right away for he is a man of honor and of integrity. Even though he would jump at the chance to marry this woman, he knows that there is a relative who is closer who could be the kinsman-redeemer. So he shows due diligence and in the beginning of chapter four, we see Boaz sitting in his place of prominence at the gate of the city which is where the official business was done. On this day Boaz had a purpose – to find this closer relative. Lo and behold, this relative comes by and, to make a long story short, in front of the elders of the city, in front of witnesses, Boaz gets permission from this closer relative to redeem Ruth. He marries her and they have a child named Obed, maybe short for obedience, and as the book of Ruth ends it states that this child was placed in the arms of Naomi and this beautiful blessing was announced by the women who were present: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.” (4:14)

What does this blessing mean? It is first a praise to the Lord for this newborn baby. Secondly the women have asked God to make Obed's name famous – don't mistake it for Boaz's name. Yes, Boaz redeemed Ruth and Naomi, but it is Obed that becomes the redeemer of the family legacy. It is Obed who eventually becomes the father of Jesse, who is the father of King David. It is through the line of King David whom God promised to deliver His ultimate Redeemer, Jesus Christ! Indeed – Obed became famous in Israel because he became part of the genealogy of Christ.

Have you seen the picture yet? Are you catching on to what just happened? God, in His incredible timing and wisdom and grace, inserted not just once but twice Gentiles into the ancestral line of Christ. The first time we have not mentioned, but Matthew does in his Gospel. Quickly turn to [Matthew 1:5](#): It states in [Matthew 1:5](#), “Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse.”

Do you remember who Rahab was? Rahab was the prostitute who was found in the walls of Jericho by the spies of Israel. She was a Gentile and a Gentile who was a prostitute at that. Ruth, from Moab, was also a Gentile! It excites me every time I think about it – Christ came not only to redeem the Jews, but the Gentiles as well because His human blood was part Gentile. God knew what He was doing as He guided the paths of the people of Ruth’s day. And He knows now. Don’t ever think that God is not in control, because He is. Don’t ever think that your suffering, whatever you are going through, is worth nothing to God. Because it is. Naomi’s suffering was. Ruth’s suffering was. God used it to bring glory to His name and He used it to not only provide a redeemer for Naomi, but a Redeemer for the world. The results of Ruth’s obedience far outweighed the suffering in Ruth’s life. Because she took risks, because she was loyal, because she served faithfully, because she submitted to her elders and to God, because of Ruth’s obedience to the Spirit she was blessed by God and became a special part of His plan to bring Light into a broken and dark world. God, knowing that we are sinners, utterly and totally depraved, sent His Son into the world to be our Redeemer, for we are as Naomi and Ruth. According to chapter 2 verse they were considered as if they were dead. And we too are considered as if we are dead. We are helpless and without hope.

We have no hope of an eternal life in peace without a Redeemer who, by His grace and mercy, shed His blood for us and paid the ultimate sacrifice of His life on our behalf. It is through faith in Jesus that we are saved, but it is through obedience that we are blessed.

Sometimes obedience means getting us out of our comfort zones. What you and I need to do is determine what our comfort zone is and then realize that our comfort zone can be a stumbling block in placing our full trust and obedience in God. We can start trusting our comfort zone instead of trusting our God.

If God is pulling on your heart string and asking you to do something – do it! If God wants you to go on that mission trip you’ve been putting off for a few years – do it. If He is calling you to talk to a friend or another relative about Christ – do it. If He is calling you to become more active in the church – do it! If He is calling you to give a little more in the offering plate to the point that it makes you a little uncomfortable – do it! If He is calling you to quit your job and to go into vocational ministry for the furthering of His kingdom – do it! If He is calling you to forgive your co-worker who wronged you or if He is calling you to seek forgiveness for something you know you did was wrong – then do it! Don’t wait around until it is too late. Take some risks for God! Get into that place where it is uncomfortable because chances are, that may be exactly the place where God wants you to be. He said He would give us eternal life, He never said life on this earth would be comfortable.

The simple truth is this - If we would only trust Him, then obedience would be a cinch. Because putting our trust in a sovereign God allows us to relinquish all control to Him and we have no other choice but to follow His lead obediently. Do you trust Him? Will you obey Him?