

# THE INSANITY OF OBEDIENCE IS JESUS WORTH IT?

Matthew 16:13-27 (ESV)

- <sup>13</sup> ... when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”
- <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”
- <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”
- <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
- <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
- <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.
- <sup>21</sup> From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.
- <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”
- <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” <sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

From Nik Ripken:

Many of us have a personal theology . . . that has very little to do with what God teaches us in his word.

In all likelihood, part of that personal theology suggests that things work out for those who obey, that blessings come to those who follow God’s call, and that the result of discipleship is health and wholeness and happiness. And we are inclined to believe that – even when it is directly contradicted by God’s word.

In today’s passage, Jesus talks to his followers about his own obedience, and about theirs. In both cases, Jesus points to the high cost that will follow obedience. For his part, he explains that he will suffer many things and that he will be killed. With those painful words echoing in the air, Jesus then talks about the suffering that will come to those who follow him.

We tend to embrace stories with happy endings, but this story told by Jesus has no happy ending at all, at least not in the short term. He tells his dear friends plainly that following him will mean denying themselves and taking up the cross.

The context for these hard words is startling. In response to Jesus’ question about his identity, Peter has answered correctly. With God-given insight, Peter has passed the test: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (16:16). Then Jesus proceeds to explain exactly what it means for him to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He speaks of suffering. He speaks of persecution. He speaks of death. Clearly, Jesus intends to be radically obedient to his Father; he will not be dissuaded by the expectations of others (even Peter). This kind of obedience will cost him everything.

Frankly, it is one thing to hear Jesus talking about his own cross. It is another thing altogether to hear him talking about my cross and yours. It is one thing to hear Jesus talking about losing his own life; it is another thing altogether to hear what he says about your life and mine.

But he cannot be any clearer. Jesus will obey his Father – and he fully expects his followers to do the same.

For Jesus, this obedience is no mere obligation. It is a joyous response to his Father, growing out of deep and abiding trust. Quite simply, Jesus obeys *because he wants to*. As costly as obedience will be for Jesus, it is not a duty, not a begrudging resignation – it is, rather, a joyous opportunity to respond to his Father’s love.

And we are invited to approach obedience the same way – to obey our Lord simply because we want to, to live a life beyond the rules and requirements, to obey as a direct outcome of a joyous, life-giving relationship with this God who loves us so. Yes, obedience will carry a high cost; Jesus has made that clear. Still, we joyfully obey – and we find our lives by losing them. We submit our dreams to the One who made us – and we discover that for which we were created.

To be sure, obedience will always be costly. We cannot be surprised that Jesus tells us the truth. But that high cost need not be a begrudging debt. Even the cost of obedience can be a joyous offering of praise – something that is difficult *and* wonderful at the same time.

God wants our obedience. Even more, he wants our hearts. He wants for us to *want* to obey. And he himself will provide all that we need for that to happen.

Jesus obeyed his Father. And those who follow Jesus will do the same. Not simply because that kind of obedience is required – but because those who follow Jesus are becoming the kind of people who want to obey.

*Lord God,  
change me.  
Change my heart.  
Give me the courage to love you deeply.  
Give me the strength to obey you fully.  
Help me to trust you enough to walk with you . . . with confidence and hope and joy.  
Teach me that the high cost of obedience  
can be an offering of praise.  
Help me not to seek another way, an easier way – but to embrace this way that you have set before me, costly though it may be.  
Help me to find my life by giving it away.  
Help me to find freedom in service to others. Help me find great joy in deep surrender.  
I desire to live a life of joyful obedience before you. Amen*

**From the text:**

1. In a world of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ we possess the \_\_\_\_\_ about God thru Christ.
2. Jesus promises to \_\_\_\_\_ on that essential truth.
3. The understanding of that truth and the belief and confession of that truth \_\_\_\_\_!
4. Costly \_\_\_\_\_ and costly \_\_\_\_\_, this Truth is worth \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Those who truly follow Christ are choosing a life of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Jesus will \_\_\_\_\_ all that is done for His sake.

**Luke 6:46-49 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> “**Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?**

<sup>47</sup> Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: <sup>48</sup> he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. <sup>49</sup> But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

Question 1: Am I ...

Question 2: What is ...

For **reflection** and **application**:

1. What Jesus says about costly obedience is so contrary to what our world says. (Sadly, it is often contrary even to what the church says!) How might you absorb and embrace this truth that is so clearly out of step with the other messages that compete for your heart and mind?
2. What will a life of radical obedience look like for you – right now? What will it mean for you to deny yourself? What will it look like for you to take up your cross?
3. Is your obedience normally a begrudging obligation – or is it a joyful response to God? What is the difference between an obligation and a joyful response?

Our prayers: