

Advent: The Thrill Of Obedience

Invocation:

The glory of our Lord Jesus; *(say aloud this statement about the obedience of the Son)*

Father, let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus:

Who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but emptied Himself,
taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled Himself

and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place
and gave Him the name above all names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.¹

Scripture: *(read these to see teaching about obedience)*

- Daniel 12,
- John:5.17-23,
- Romans 1.1-6

Note: Main words translated 'obey' or 'obedience':

hupakouo to come under, or receive what you hear

tareo to keep, guard or keep personal what you are given or told

Hymn: *by C Wesley*

1. Jesus, the Conqueror, reigns, in glorious strength arrayed;
His kingdom over all maintains, and bids the earth be glad.
 2. Ye sons of men, rejoice in Jesus' mighty love;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice, to Him who rules above.
 3. Extol His kingly power; kiss the exalted Son,
Who died, and lives to die no more, high on His Father's throne:
 4. Our Advocate with God, He undertakes our cause,
And spreads through all the earth abroad the victory of His cross.
- Amen

Advent has thrilling accounts of obedience: Joseph, Mary, Magi, Shepherds. Besides miss-steps-Zechariah. Our Lord commanded all things through obedience and has brought us into obedient relationship with His father.

The Thrill of Obedience: 'I will obey everything God tells me'

The New year is nearly upon us. A sense of a new beginning, a fresh start. What lies ahead of us? Potential world war triggers raise anxiety; Taiwan and China, the Middle East around Jerusalem, Central Asia with Ukraine. Then there are the great belief systems taking up arms; Islam, secular humanism and communism. But more glaringly, the ideologies claiming obedience of the soul, mocking God, promising luxury living, guaranteed health and welfare care but asking obedience to their gods of greed, pleasure and self interest.

Through and among it all however, there is a remnant that loves and obeys God. What about them? In my lifetime authors have tried to predict the future based on trends around them in their day: Aldous Huxley's Brave New World in the early thirties ominously presaging world control by a malign mind, and then came the Third Reich. George Orwell of 'Animal Farm' and '1984' warns of advancing totalitarianism. Many lesser known works have taken up the theme of malign societies awaiting us in the future. Even our own Tim Winton attempts this in his latest work with the evil oil producers and environment contaminators set against ordinary earth dwellers.

They all have a dystopian view of the future; a future where injustice and unkindness rule over decent ordinary people swept up in in the banal horrors and cruelty of a dominant social structure. Perhaps an emerging hero will save the world? Or not!

And then there is the only truly reliable outline of the future. The God-breathed revelation. Nestled in this most endurable of writings is Daniel and his Book of visions in the prophetic section of the Bible.

Daniel was written most likely towards the end of the sixth century and in four great visions plus one magnificent heavenly revelation details the exact outline of what is ahead. Jesus loved the Book of Daniel. He elucidated and built on it when he answered the disciples' question as they chatted outside looking up at one of the wonders of the ancient world-the temple in Jerusalem.

When Jesus shrugged at its architectural magnificence and predicted that he would build a far greater masterpiece, they asked him 'when will this be . . .and the sign of the end of the age?' It was here that Jesus referred to Daniel and the thrice stated "abomination of desolation" in that inspired book, and detailed what would really happen in the immediate and distant future.

Daniel was shocked helpless and speechless as the visions of tomorrow were given to him, four of them, from 604 BC when a young man up to the end of his life in his late 80's. First, he was told the consequences to the chosen nation of Israel which rebelled against its Divine call to bring the law of justice and peace to the world. Secondly, the true believers, saints; those who stand apart, trusting El Shaddai, the Mighty One, whose ways they love and whose might safeguards them.

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These two streams describe and define history. The beauty of obedience. The dark ugliness of rebellion.

Only twelve chapters, and the final sentences sum it all up: after summarizing in stunning detail what will happen in the future there is one simple enduring statement.

The visions of the future nations and powers have left the old man trembling, speechless, shivering in amazement at sights and interpretations of events he had never imagined possible. Then sudden calm; the revealing messenger assures him, 'its alright. Just go your way now, live normally, do what you need to do as each day presents itself. Soon you will pass and rest. But then you will rise and receive what is your promised allotted inheritance.' History will roll on according to the Great Shepherd's Almighty plan. 'Nothing can stop it until the events I have told you will suddenly come and fully unfold.'

But then! The key event of history is made clear. What matters most on planet earth, what Heaven is searching and working for through the rapidly passing millennial years is made clear, the revealer concludes it all with: *"Then the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever. Many will be purified, made spotless, and refined, but the wicked will continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked will understand, but the wise will understand"*ⁱⁱⁱ.

Obedience to the Lord of holy love. Who loves each and all so much as to leave heaven, enter into earth's broken mess, absorb its screaming sin in his very own flesh, and rising, start all over with a race of children who love him and hunger to follow His laws and ways. True children of Life .

History is the whole creation witnessing us, his children, revealing His glorious Law of holy love. This is the holy remnant through every generation. You desire to be part of that? Good. Tell the Father God again, now, that you want to know and walk in obedience today, like His Son. Be proud of what the Lord has already wrought in you; and thank Him.

Prayer:

Dear Father, thank you for changing me so far. Keep leading me in your amazing law, your ways. There is no greater thrill than discovering fresh deeds of obedience, new actions of life real life, which last. Father, my mind and body are yours to make heaven happen on earth in me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflection:

Edited from Aristeides c.150 AD, an insight into how Christians lived in the second century. Outside the Bible itself this is the very earliest document of a Christian leader arguing the case before a Roman official of the truth of Christian social behaviour and thus their great worth to their neighbours and society...

But the Christians, O King, [Ed. Emperor Hadrian] while they went about and made search, have found the truth; and as we learned from their writings, they have come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations. For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and of earth, in whom and from whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they

received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come. Wherefore they do not commit adultery nor fornication, nor bear false witness, nor embezzle what is held in pledge, nor covet what is not theirs. They honour father and mother, and show kindness to those near to them; and whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly.

And their oppressors they appease [lit: comfort] and make them their friends; they do good to their enemies; and their women, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest; and their men keep themselves from every unlawful union and from all uncleanness, in the hope of a recompense to come in the other world.

They do not worship strange gods, and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God.

And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free.

And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them.

Every morning and every hour they give thanks and praise to God for His loving-kindnesses toward them; and for their food and their drink they offer thanksgiving to Him. And when a child has been born to one of them, they give thanks to God; and if moreover it happen to die in childhood, they give thanks to God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. And further if they see that any one of them dies in his ungodliness or in his sins, for him they grieve bitterly, and sorrow as for one who goes to meet his doom.

Such, O King, is the commandment of the law of the Christians, and such is their manner of life. As men who know God, they ask from Him petitions which are fitting for Him to grant and for them to receive. And thus they employ their whole lifetime. And since they know the loving-kindnesses of God toward them, behold! for their sake the glorious things which are in the world flow forth to view.

And to me there is no doubt but that the earth abides through the supplication of the Christians. But the rest of the nations err and cause error in wallowing before the elements of the world, since beyond these their mental vision will not pass. And they search about as if in darkness because they will not recognize the truth; and like drunken men they reel and jostle one another and fall.....

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Hymn: *by C Wesley*

1. The thing my God doth hate that I no more may do,
Thy creature, Lord, again create, and all my soul renew;
My soul shall then, like thine, abhor the thing unclean,
And, sanctified by love divine, for ever cease from sin.
2. That blessed law of thine, Jesus, to me impart;
The Spirit's law of life divine, O write it in my heart!
Implant it deep within, whence it may ne'er remove,
The law of liberty from sin, the perfect law of love.
3. Thy nature be my law, Thy spotless sanctity,
And sweetly every moment draw my happy soul to thee.
Soul of my soul remain! Who didst for all fulfil,
In me, O Lord, fulfil again Thy heavenly Father's will!

Benediction:

May the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone else, may he establish your hearts in blamelessness and holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Amen.

This services was prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

ⁱ Philippians 2.6ff

ⁱⁱ Daniel 12.3,10