

## Destiny leads to Obedience

We are amazing consumers. We have been trained and coached, sometimes for decades to be good consumers of all that the world has to offer. We are taught to constantly strive for better and better. We are constantly told that we are not enough without a product that we could be sold for a price worth paying. Not good enough, tall enough, good looking enough, earning enough, young looking enough. And so there are companies out there ready to help us.

And we know who they are and we know their chat up lines:

I wonder if you recognise these:

Every little helps (Tesco)

Have a break, have a ..... (Kitkat)

Beanz meanz (Heinz)

Probably the best Beer in the world (Carlsberg)

Because you're worth it (L'Oreal)

Actually God sent His son because you're worth it!

And being a good consumer is a strange thing - a paradox really. And it can encourage us disciples to question what we are called to do.

On the one hand we are told to strive for better, yet on the other hand it can make us into those who discard what we have for the promise of something better.

We are told to shop around but also to stay loyal.

We are encouraged to consider what benefit we get out of something but it can so easily make us self-centred and questioning what benefit do we get out of everything.

We are encouraged to be different and unique yet we are also encouraged to conform to be like everyone else - maybe even with silky hair and skin that looks 20 years younger than we are.

As consumers, some consider what church does for them and this may stop them growing as disciples.

So far in this series we have considered:

How can we get closer to God.

That we are loved by God and called to be close to him as his children.

How we are children of God and that we have the authority to pray and ask for the spirit to act in the lives around us.

And that in His service we can grow into the disciples he wants us to aspire to be.

Today we go on to consider how our growth as disciples might lead us to be more obedient to Him.

We have seen in this series the use of words that are not often used and are often avoided because they have baggage behind them: intimacy, authority, destiny and now obedience.

Now I don't think that obedience is a popular word at the moment. It is often relegated to dog agility classes, marriage vows when the couple haven't asked to have it removed and to that of a law obsessed, rule gripped jobsworth who will hold us to ransom with our obedience to the rules.

It is never used in describing loving and caring relationships. It is never considered to be part of how we would choose to live.

But obedience the Jesus way is actually very freeing. Obedience the Jesus way opens up opportunities rather than being confined and constricted the way humanity does obedience.

As Jesus demonstrated his love for God and his love for the people so we see an obedience to the spirit and greater opportunities to facilitate God's kingdom being seen.

In the reading from John though, we see Jesus respond to a question in a rather peculiar way.

Sir we want too see Jesus. And Jesus appears to ignore this request or even to answer it in a way that answers a different question altogether.

But maybe what Jesus replies could be read as - it is time that, rather from being seen by everyone here, I need to be obedient to God's plan and be raised for all to see me.

In this way one seed that is planted in the world by God, becomes the amazing harvest that saves the world.

In responding in this way, and indeed throughout his time on the earth, Jesus is continuing his work to encourage his disciples to be obedient to the will of God and ever-ready to hear the call of God.

His call to us as workers in the harvest is a direct call on each one of us to join in making the kingdom of God real for people.

His aim for them and us - is that his disciples know of his love, share in the life that he gives and to carry that life and love into every place that we go, ready to share it with whoever we are called to share it with.

Fast forward then.

Jesus' words to his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel make two things abundantly clear to us:

(1) We are to go wherever we are called and spread the Good News with whomever we are called to share it, in ways that are relevant and sensitive and according to our talents and abilities.

and a reminder (2) We are not called to do this alone - we are called to do this with God.

But like learning a new skill for the first time, it is difficult to know - where do I start, how will it work, what will it be like?

Like riding a bike or steering a boat, like playing an instrument or driving a car. We follow instructions and we learn. We try under the watchful eye of someone who encourages and one who corrects. Someone who believes in our abilities and ultimately wants us to succeed. And only when we grasp that then we are ready to try by ourselves and our confidence grows. Our confidence grows and our success flows.

Like asking someone if they would like you to pray for them.

A little voice might be saying - go on just ask.

They might say yes. They might say no. But either way the thought is there.

A seed has been planted.

Like asking someone to come to a service they might be uplifted by:

All Saints, A carol service, the lantern walk.

They might say yes. They might say no. But either way the thought is there.

A seed has been planted.

Like thinking about ringing someone or popping by.

It might be the right time. It might be the wrong time. But the seed is planted and it could be one of those times when they most needed someone and God put you there.

\*a few weeks ago I stepped out of the house ready to drive to (Brundall) church. I felt a thought saying 'walk, just walk' and after questioning it I decided that I would walk. As I walked to church I bumped into a couple that I wanted to see who wanted me to pray wither.further on I saw someone else

coming out of coop who I could approach and say hello - it happens they had wondered how to contact me that week. If I had not been obedient then I would not have been in that place. I am learning to be more obedient to these moments when God is leading.\*

In our house we don't talk about coincidence very much - we talk about God incidents. When we hear God, obey him, and are open to what happens next.

And as a parent takes their hands off the bike and watches us as we cycle on, as they look on us smiling at what we have done and what we have learnt. So might God be encouraging us to take that next step towards deeper discipleship and opening our awareness to how close he is to us.

Our obedience then leads us closer to the will of God.  
But more on that next week.

So who we are - children of God - leads to what we do.

And what we do leads us to what we say and how we see God in our lives and in our communities.

Living our lives in obedience to God empowers us to see Jesus in the people around us, to feel the Holy Spirit at work, to look spiritually on the world, to think divinely about those things we are walking through and to act prayerfully knowing the presence of God in our lives.

Amen