

## Faith and Obedience

John Matthews

God's way of dealing with the earth, and with man, is by means of covenant relationship. This is clearly shown in the life of Abraham. God "cut a covenant" with Abraham, a covenant which promised that through his "seed", a land would be given to the Jews and blessing would go to all the nations of the earth. This covenant, along with several other covenants in the Bible, determine how God deals with the human race.

Abraham's part was to receive God's promise: in other words, to believe it. *"Abraham believed the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness.* Genesis 15:6 NIV It did take faith, for at the time Abraham had no children, and he and Sarah were old. God promised Abraham a son, who was named Isaac. Isaac means "laughter", a name perhaps given because both Abraham and Sarah laughed when God promised them a son.

Abraham was near one hundred years old, and Sarah was ninety. Having received Isaac, God later tested Abraham severely. God asked Abraham to do something against His design for mankind. He asked Abraham to sacrifice His son.

How could God ask such a thing, demand such a thing of His friend Abraham? As it turned out, God did not want the actual sacrifice of Isaac. He wanted to find out if Abraham would be willing to give up his promised son. God wanted to know if Abraham would do whatever he was told.

*"Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*

If we had only the Old Testament, we could only speculate what Abraham thought about this command of his friend, God. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in the region of Moriah. Moriah was the area where God would give Jesus His only Son to be sacrificed two thousand years later. While some distance from Moriah, Abraham told the young men to stay with the donkey, while he and Isaac proceeded onward. He said, *"and we will worship and return to you."* Abraham expected that he and Isaac would both return. As they got closer, Isaac spoke: *"My father! Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb of the burnt offering?"* Abraham said, *"God will provide for Himself the lamb..., my son."* Genesis 22 NIV

There is a further insight into Abraham's thoughts in the New Testament: *"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."* Hebrews 11:17-19 NIV

Abraham knew his friend, God. He could not understand why God gave him this command, but he knew that God could not and would not violate or go back on His covenant promise. So, he could reason only one thing: that God would raise Isaac from the dead, and they would go home together.

One thing is evident: Abraham was prepared to do exactly what God had told him to do. **His complete faith in God led him to complete obedience to God.** When Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay Isaac, the angel of the Lord called out to him:

*"Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear (reverence) God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me. Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the*

*place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place the Lord Will Provide (Jehovah Jireh), as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.'*" Genesis 22 NIV

Someone has said, "God is never late, but He is not often early". It was only when Abraham took the knife, and was within seconds of slaying his son that God spoke, and God provided.

When Abraham's obedience (which came from his complete faith in God) was complete, when God knew there was no longer any time for him to turn back, then and only then did God intervene for Abraham.

After Abraham's complete abandonment and obedience to God in the giving of his only son, God again declared His covenant to Abraham, but now with more force and more power and more promise.

*"While blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."* Genesis 22

Faith and obedience are not really two different things. If a man has true faith in God, he will do what He says.

Paul wrote of this as "the obedience of faith". He wrote, *"we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations for His name's sake."* Romans 1:5 NAS

There is a word in Hebrews that in the original language means both unbelief and disobedience. For that reason, translators have translated this word in following verse in two different ways:

*"And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who **disobeyed?**"* Hebrews 3:18 NIV

*"And to whom swore He that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that **believed not?**"* Hebrews 3:18 KJV

This is why James wrote what he did:

*"When will you ever learn that "believing" is useless without doing what God wants you to? Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith.*

*Don't you remember that even our father Abraham was declared good because of what he did when he was willing to obey God, even if it meant offering his son Isaac to die on the altar? You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to; his faith was made complete by what he did-by his actions, his good deeds. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say, that Abraham trusted God, and the Lord declared him good in God's sight, and he was even called "the friend of God." So you see, a man is saved by what he does, as well as by what he believes. Rahab, the prostitute, is another example of this. She was saved because of what she did when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead when there is no spirit in it, so faith is dead if it is not the kind that results in good deeds."* James 2 TLB

When true faith is present, obedience will follow. That requires action. However, sometimes obedience requires us NOT take action right away, but to wait for God's timing. Regardless, obedience is the outcome of true faith in God.

Obedience is not trying to perform for God, nor is it doing "the works of law". That is the futility of human effort apart from God's grace. Obedience to God is something else. Obedience can only come through faith in God's Word to you. Through that faith, God's

grace is imparted to you. God's grace is His supernatural power and provision which is given to you so that you are able to do the will of God. This may mean to do nothing for

now, or it may mean to take action immediately. It is your obedience that comes from your faith in God and in His Word to you. Your faith leads you to total abandonment to God's voice and complete obedience to what He tells you to do. Hebrews 11 is called God's "Hall of Fame of Faith". In its description of the saints of old, one thing is clear: their faith was described more as their experience more than as their philosophy of life.

Faith was seen in what they did, and in what God did in response to their faith. Faith was not primarily rooted in what they thought or felt. Their faith moved them to act in accord with God's will, or it moved God to act on their behalf. In one way or another, where there was faith, something happened.

*By faith Noah prepared an ark...*

*By faith Abraham obeyed by going out to a place...*

*By faith Sarah received ability to conceive...*

*By faith Isaac blessed his sons...*

*By faith the parents of Moses hid him...*

*By faith Moses chose to endure ill treatment with God's people...*

*By faith God's people passed through the Red Sea...*

*By faith Rahab did not perish...*

Faith comes to life in the action of obedience. When you try to look inside yourself to find your faith, you may not find it. It is not in your mind or in your emotions. You will find your faith in your mouth -- in the action of speaking out His Word. You will find your faith is in your hands and your feet -- in the action of living and acting according to what God has said. Put your feet in the direction of what you believe. Put your hands to work in the direction of what God has shown you. Put your words into action as well, speaking in agreement with the Word of God.

The faith that is in your heart - in your spirit - comes to life in your words, in your hands, and in your feet.

Just do what God says.

A great hymn of the Church says it:

*Trust and obey,*

*For there's no other way*

*To be happy in Jesus,*

*But to trust and obey.*

John Matthews