

## **Obedience Under the God-King**

### **Obedience is Driven by the Heart and Powered by Belief**

The Apostle Peter, a man that Jesus brought to salvation and prayed to God the Father that His faith would not fail, once wrote this:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” That is 1 Peter 2 v 9.

Peter was not by upbringing or occupation a person who would be considered an elite by the people of his time. He was often mocked, thought lowly of, regarded as a public drunk (although he was not drunk as drunkenness would be classed) and He denied knowing Jesus multiple times in public.

Many years later, he began to be viewed in a very different light. Of course, almost entirely by Christians. And today, by those who believe or would believe, he is seen very differently.

Of course, he was just a human being, like you and me, who mixed the faith that God gave him (which God also gives to each of us) with the words that God spoke to him (which God has made available to each and every one of us). The mixture of God-given faith and what God says is what I like to call Big-God, capital G, living. This is Christian life at its maximalist peak, but also at its simplest.

It is the humble beginning of Christian life, and funny enough, it never stops being that. It is always faith in Big God. Any addition to what God says that is not faith is a man-made altar.

Have you ever wondered at the awesomeness of the planes or rockets or skyscrapers? In a roundabout way, that wonder is a seed of faith from God. Yes, wonder is a seed of faith. The wrong type of wonder, however, is a seed of fear from the devil.

It's no surprise that we ooh and aah about these things that are created – really lost in the present experience of those things – but perhaps almost too often we don't spare a thought for the person who imagined it, or designed it, or eventually constructed it.

The odd time, I guess, if it is someone that is still alive and present in the general consciousness, then we may get to know, see or hear something of them. That is the odd time though.

Consider then how this analogy applies to the person who holds gravity, the sun, the moon, the tidal waves of the seas, the rain from heaven and the fruit of the ground? We are so in awe of our world, so aware of its power and its resources, but too many are completely unaware of the Creator of it all. And those that are aware are probably not aware enough of the immeasurable greatness of His power.

So, Christian life is simply the appropriate redirection of our awe and our faith – away from the creation to the Creator. But the idea of redirection speaks of an earlier misdirection.

How many in the world see Jesus Christ as God and believe in Him? Would you say the believers in Jesus Christ are in the majority or in the minority?

I find it a curiosity that a life lived forwards and upwards toward God even needs to be advertised. I find it a curiosity that people do not readily identify the God-shaped hole in their lives. I find it a curiosity that we live in a world where it is entirely possible that the majority of people are misdirected and in need of redirection to Jesus.

How is God not more – for lack of a better word – popular? Is this what the power of God looks like? I won't fall into the trap of that last question.

But genuinely, it is a curiosity because God is bigger than all our human forms of measurement (e.g. great and small, rich and poor, old and young, male and female), yet it is entirely possible the division between majority and minority is lopsided. We can visualize by using the force of gravity as an example. Imagine two similar groups of people in a field: one group weightless, the other feet planted to the ground. The question being: how can the One God, the unchanging God impact so differently on us humans.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 10 v 14: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"

So, essentially, if a person is in need of redirection, they are more likely to call on God if they believe in God. And they are more likely to believe the more they hear of him. And to have heard just once is much better than never having heard.

So the difference between two similar groups of people who, on one hand, believe and, on the other, do not believe, is that overwhelmingly those who believe in Jesus and have called on Him are those who have heard of Him.

### **Obedience is not possible without love**

Deuteronomy 7 v 6 – 8 says:

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His prized possession out of all peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than the other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your fathers, He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

Verse 9 says: "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps His covenant of loving devotion for a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments."

The covenant held by love.

Have you ever considered that life in Christ is a covenant of love? To love Him with all you heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

A theological definition of covenant refers to it as "an agreement which brings about a relationship of commitment between God and His people."

So the Apostle John was right when He said: "we love because He first loved us".

We are faithful because He was first faithful. We remain faithful because He never stops being faithful.

We will follow Jesus and go with Him all the way because, according to Hebrews 7 v 25, “he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

He always. He always lives. He always lives to save to the uttermost “those”. He is always interceding for those who draw near to God through Him. His unending goal is a complete and permanent salvation that was bought with the highest possible prize: His own death on the cross.

So, if he does not love because of our strength or stature or influence or wealth, but on the basis of who He is. In response, we love Him on the basis of who He is, not focusing on just his strength, stature, influence or wealth. We don’t chase His hand, we chase His face. We want to lock eyes, we want to know Him. People say the eyes are window to the soul; well, in seeking His face, our interest is in securing His pleasure and avoiding His displeasure.

**Obedience is a nature. It is spiritually inherited so it must be physically acquired.**

We don’t get to ditch this minority life. It is a heritage actually.

To be royal, chosen, set apart, holy, priests: think of sport teams representing their nations. There are maybe a maximum of 30 to 40 individuals, out of a nation of millions? Holiness and priesthood: again, these are not brackets that people run in their droves to fill. In fact, by tribe, the Levites who were ordained by God to tend to the priestly duties, were the least of all the tribes of Israel.

There is an element of humanity – you see a bit of it through peer pressure – where no one wants to be the odd one out. But through a particular lens, there is a way where God – being an only one – is an odd one out! There is no one like him and to have our lives in Christ, to associate with his one-of-a-kind-ness, what a blessedness it is!

And this choosing, setting apart, making holy and the setting of his love on us, it is not deserved, it is not earned, it is totally and completely a favor. A blessing.

Galatians 3 v 6-9

“just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

The blessing of Abraham is the God-given power given to the minority that obeys Him to achieve incredible things.

### **Obedience and positivity go hand in hand. It believes it in a bright future.**

Deuteronomy 7 v 17 – 18 says: “You may say in your heart, “These nations are greater than we are; how can we drive them out?” But do not be afraid of them. Be sure to remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and all Egypt.”

It’s one thing to be prepared to obey God and it is quite another to believe that your obedience will lead to the victory.

The mixture of faith with what God has said is so, so important. If you can mix faith in, it means it is also possible to mix in doubt or unbelief into what God has said.

### **Obedience is its own blessing, and a blessing beyond earth too!**

It is not God’s design that his children are a minority. Romans 3 vs 23 explains that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. At base camp, all are in the group headed for hell. The challenge of life is to enter the company of those heaven-bound.

We all make changes in our lives every day. These changes can include how we see and interact with the world, and how we legislate the importance of life. Some changes are superficial, some are flash-in-the-pan and ultimately undercooked, while some are slow-burners but eventually long-lasting.

How many of us actually make life-altering changes though? How many leave the base camp of sin for the rarified air of God’s holiness?

2 Peter 3 v 9 puts it like this: that it is not God’s wish “that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

And a day will come when as in Habakkuk 2 v 14 “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”, but this does not mean it is a given that the minority will become a majority.

I certainly hope it does, however I do not think I am wrong in guessing that more have died living independent of God than dependent on Him. Or in other words, more human beings have gone to Hell than have gone to Heaven.

To clarify, I don’t regard this as an acceptable status quo and I am not being blasé about it. But I say it to speak to the blessedness and preciousness of being in the minority (and remaining in it, against all the odds and the attempts of the devil!)

It is a special thing to be near to God. Psalm 65 v 4 says: Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! [It continues] We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

These minority are satisfied with the demands of Big-God living. We are satisfied with His goodness and what that looks like. We are satisfied with His holiness and what that demands!

What does God’s goodness look like to you?

**Obedience to God does not promise the absence of suffering; it promises the presence of God and fellowship with Him.**

Deuteronomy 8 v 2 – 6

The Christian life, Jesus being the way, truth and life, the minority life, is designed to itself set us apart. The people that are in Christ, in this minority are – if you look again at 1 Peter 2 v 9 – chosen, priests, holy and people for his possession.

I feel like that verse starts off big (chosen race) and with each designation (royal priesthood, holy nation, people for his possession, proclaiming the excellency of Him, and finally, in the light) the band gets tighter and tighter, till it is just the remnant that remain.

That's what Deuteronomy 8 v 2 is getting at: this minority, in the wilderness, being humbled and being tested, to know what is in their heart, if they would keep His commandments or not. Then verse 16: to do them good in the end.

**Obedience recognises God and gives Him pride of place.**

Deuteronomy 8 v 11 – 19. This looks a lot like what we spoke on in our first episode with UCB Full Access.

God formed the world, he did not make it to be empty. He has commanded that it is inhabited. Some people inhabit but ignore and/or forget God who gave the command. They do the work but do not apply faith. They leave faith so far behind that they get to a point where – God is forgotten – and they attribute all their achievements to themselves. The planes, the rockets, the skyscrapers – all them, no God.

They attribute their health to themselves because they work hard, earn good money to eat healthily and hire personal trainers.

They attribute their livelihood to themselves because they work hard and earn good money or know how to work whatever system they are in.

We can go on and on about all the ways we attribute our successes in life to ourselves.

It is a minority that do not do this. A remnant for God. The chosen, priestly, holy, set apart people for his possession that rightly point to Big God as the true source of everything.

Let's read verse 20:

The people that perish do so because of disobedience to God's voice.

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As Christians, navigating our slice of earth, many of us will have wondered: why are there not more like me?

Well, before going into any of that, if it is any comfort, we should know that it is not God's design that his children are a minority.

However, the course of human history – encapsulated by Romans 3 v 23, which famously says: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" – suggests it is a steep climb to a majority.

The verse also suggests that the great challenge of life for all of us is to dislocate from being hell-bound to Heaven-bound. Or said in a different way: at base camp, from the starting blocks, there are more heading to hell than to Heaven.

Deuteronomy 7 v 6 – 8 was a message to historical Israel:

*"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His prized possession out of all peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than the other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your fathers, He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."*

John 3 v 16 ESV heralded a similar message but opened it up to a wider audience: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Merging these two scriptures together, the take-home message is that God's love flowed out and continues to outflow into a choice to have not only people from Israel as His own but also people from the rest of the world.

God, having made His choice (a first move of potentially many more), has presented every one of us at the age of accountability and beyond it with two options as a form of response: to believe in Jesus Christ or to not.

To repeat that again, the options from God are: to believe – or to not – that all of us have sinned and that the price of sin is death, but also that the free gift of God through Jesus Christ is life and more life if we would repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

Romans 3 vs 23 suggests that one hundred percent of people on Earth have a call from God on their lives to shift towards holiness (as the response to Jesus Christ). The implication is that we are all short of His intention and we all need to make that shift.

So, on one hand, there is what needs to be done. And on the other hand, there is what will be done. The thing that decides for minorities or majorities is obedience.

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It is not God's design or desire that those He has chosen (by His love) are a minority – it is not a given that they are either – but the two passages referenced above in Deuteronomy and John point to this as an inevitability.

In Deuteronomy, Israel is described as the fewest of all peoples. Well, one hundred percent of the fewest people is still few; as is a fraction of the same. In John, the message of love to the wider world distills to a plea for individual belief.

Even the infinite power of God's love does not turn minorities into majorities. Ultimately, only our individual choices can. So maybe a mindset change is required. God's love is not a guarantee of being in the earthly majority. God's love is a guarantee of his salvation.

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We all make changes in our lives. We may change how we see the world. Based on a life experience, we may change how we interact with the world. However, the real power of change is in the value we assign to the change itself – what it means to us. Some people make changes and it ends up having being superficial, flash-in-the-pan and ultimately undercooked. In the hands of a different person, the same changes may burn slow at first but eventually become something long-lasting.

How many of us actually make life-altering changes though? How many leave the base camp of sin for the rarified air of God's holiness? Life in Jesus Christ is a life-altering change. How many choose life in Jesus Christ and assign it its true value?

2 Peter 3 v 9 puts it like this: that it is not God's wish "that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

And a day will come when as in Habakkuk 2 v 14 "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea", but this does not mean it is a given that the minority will become a majority because knowledge does not always convert easily to wisdom. Although, I certainly hope for a majority.

Would I be wrong in guessing that more have died living independent of God than dependent on Him? Or that more human beings have gone to hell than have gone to Heaven? I lean towards that being true but I cannot speak with any certainty beyond just my intuition.

I do not say any of this to suggest that 'it is what it is'. I do not regard this as an acceptable status quo and I don't think I am being blasé about it. I certainly do not intend to be. I do, however, say it to speak to the blessedness and preciousness of living in Jesus Christ (and remaining in Him, against all the odds and the attempts of the devil, even if it may be uncommon!)

It is a special thing to be near to God. Psalm 65 v 4 says: "Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!"

We are satisfied with the demands of Big-God living. We are satisfied with His goodness and what that looks like. We are satisfied with His holiness and what that demands! We are satisfied to do what He tells us to do, trusting Him wholeheartedly.

What does God's goodness look like to you?

To me it looks like a response called obedience.