

UNCONDITIONAL OBEDIENCE

"His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." John 2:5.

Christ Jesus attended the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee. It is significant that He chose the wedding occasion as the time and place for the performance of His first miracle. How He did hallow the home! How He did glorify the ties that bind a family together! He came to glorify our common everyday life, and He would have us link it with Him. He came to give gladness, and to turn disappointment and grief into joy and peace. He came to give our clouds a silver lining.

The Lord Jesus, His mother and His disciples had been invited to this wedding feast. While there He performed a miracle, not to save man, nor to heal man, but for the purpose of making man happy. The occasion on which it was performed was a joyful one. It was at a wedding. Marriages at that time differed from those of the present day only in this respect--that there was a greater round of festivities, and they continued for a much longer period than they do now.

How it happened we do not know, but the fact is that sufficient wine had not been provided. The people of the house, therefore, must have felt themselves placed in a somewhat unpleasant and embarrassing position. With a housewife's quick perception, Mary realized that the wine was running short. Seeing the difficulty, Mary appealed to Christ saying, "They have no wine." Various explanations have been offered for the inference of Mary and for her taking it upon herself to mention the matter to Christ in the way she did.

Perhaps the most reasonable explanation is that, in bringing the matter before our Lord, Mary fully expected that He would provide a new supply of wine. Her statement, "They have no wine," seemed to suggest, "You can adjust that, and you will do so." Though this was the only petition, so far as we know, Mary ever addressed to Christ, her request was not granted. Turning to her, when she told him that the feast was in danger of coming to a disastrous end because the supply of wine was about exhausted, Jesus said, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

It is interesting to note that Christ had an hour appointed by heaven, and, as He regulated His life by the will of God, when His mother came to Him with her entreaty, He refused to grant her request. He did so on the ground that His hour had not yet come, and that her time was not that appointed by heaven. At the same time, let us guard against falling into the common error of supposing that there was in the words of the Lord any lack of respect for His mother. He simply sought to remind her that His orders were to come from His Heavenly Father rather than from His earthly mother. His statement, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come," refutes the teaching that Mary is to be worshiped. Mary was just the plain mother of Jesus, not to be worshiped at all, not to be prayed unto at all.

Observe how Mary acted after her request was denied. That she knew how to accept a refusal shows her humility and her good sense. Instead of taking offense, she submitted to the will of Christ, and manifested her faith in Him, by turning to the servants and saying, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." In other words, "Do it, even if you do not see the reason for doing so." That command was spoken to the servants, but it was not meant for the guests to hear.

Mary knew Jesus the best and she revered Him the most. She had good reasons for thinking and for speaking as she did regarding her Son. In the words which she spoke to the servants at the house, her estimation of Jesus came forth from her lips unconsciously. Naturally, we admire her character and we accept her testimony. She certainly had a perfect right to speak as she did. She who nursed Him in her own arms, who kissed Him with her own lips, who taught Him, who had Him under her eyes from His earliest days,

who had seen Him pass from childhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to manhood, unhesitatingly spoke in clear and decided words saying, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." While her words were uttered in the hearing of Christ, He did not chide her for them.

Mary's words to the servants are deeply meaningful. She recognized Christ's right to absolute obedience from us all, and urged that such obedience be given by us all. The supreme need of every human being is to obey. Let obedience be thrown away anywhere and chaos will follow. What is a home where there is no obedience? Children in the home are not to control it. The parents are to control it, and if they forget that, they are piling up wrath against the day of wrath. A home without proper parental control is a travesty. A school wherein discipline and obedience are not magnified is a misnomer.

The saddest story back in the days of Israel is stated for us in one sentence: "In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes." The well-being of society demands a standard of authority. Every human being needs mastership of the right kind. What would an army be without obedience, and where would an army get if the commands of superior officers were flagrantly set aside? The supreme need in the Christian life is obedience to Christ. Jesus Christ is absolute Master, and He has absolute right to every breath of my body, to every deed of my hand, to every thought of my mind, and to the affection of my heart. He has the three-fold right to it: He made me. He died for me. He preserves me. By this threefold right He has absolute claim to my highest and constant obedience.

What did the Lord Jesus tell those servants to do? He told them to fill six huge water-pots, which were standing there, with water and from them to replenish the empty wine-cups on the tables. It seemed an unreasonable, futile, even foolish thing to do. But they did it. They obeyed Him promptly, and instead of the wedding feast ending abruptly in confusion, it rose to a triumphant climax, for as a result of the miracle wrought by Christ that water became wine, and better wine than the guests had so far tasted.

Surely the inner meaning of this story is quite clear. What happened at Cana of Galilee is a symbol of what always happens when people have the insight and faith and courage to do what Christ says, even though it may seem to them unreasonable and futile. The only way to redeem any desperate situation is to do whatever Christ commands.

When Mary spoke to the servants saying, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it," she stated the great basic principle which runs through the Christian life. Note that she advised the servants to obey Christ literally and completely. It is a personal obedience always. There is not to be any proxyship, deputyship or sponsorship in religion. Whether anybody else obeys Him or not, you must and I must. Jonathan Edwards made this resolution: "Resolved, first, that every man ought to obey Christ without any hesitation or reserve. Resolved, second, whether anybody else does so or not, I will, so help me God." That is exactly correct. Whether anybody else does his duty or not, I must. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it!"

Like those to whom the mother of Jesus spoke, the Christian should regard himself as a servant. He should, therefore, be ready to carry out any order, to do the "whatsoever." Since the Christian servant has but one Master, he must not listen to every voice, but do what the Lord saith. The Master speaks to individuals, giving them specific tasks to perform.

The authority of Christ is unique and absolute. There are limits to the authority of all human leaders, however wise and good, and it would be folly to bind ourselves to obey them in all things. But it is the highest wisdom to yield an unhesitating and unconditional obedience to Christ. His commands all possess the authority of rectitude. Herein lies the incontrovertible ground of our obedience. None does wrong who obeys Christ. Unconditional obedience to Him will be for your true interest, abiding happiness and eternal peace.

This obedience is contrary to questioning or delay. Delay is disobedience. When we dare not tell the Lord, "I will not," we sometimes say, "I will, but not now," and soothe our consciences with the idea that this is not refusal. Too often, when the Lord commands us to do something, we reply, "Lord, suffer me first to go and do something else." Proper obedience is contrary to a consideration of the cost. It is well for us to know that we cannot follow Christ without soon and often coming to what is hard. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Don't talk about it. Don't argue about it. Don't wonder about what will be the outcome. Don't speculate on the results. Whatever Christ commands you, do it, and do it without reserve or waiting. Do what Christ says. The time has now come for action. Do not put prayer even in the place of action. There is a time to pray, and also a time to act. Begin to act. Immediate and instantaneous obedience, apart from any questions, is what is needed. Whatsoever the Lord commands us to do, let us do it in the simple confidence that He will give us the grace and power to do it. There are no non-essentials in the teachings and commands of Christ. The lowest position that one can take is to just read the sayings of Christ. A higher position is to believe them. The highest position is attained when one can say, "I do whatever He says unto me." We are to be hearers, but we are to be more; we are to be doers of the Word. There can be no excuse for the neglect of doing, and there is praise when one is a doer in as faithful a way as it is possible for him to be.

"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." What have we here? We have the expression of a claim which is absolute and supreme. "Whatsoever He saith unto you"—about your body? yes; about your soul? yes; about your business? yes; about your family? yes; about your money? yes; about your time? yes; everything? yes; "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Do whatever He says. When He makes known His will to you, do it without any reference to the reason for it. Respond to His love in the only way that love so amazing, so divine, demands. Commit yourself utterly and unreservedly to Him. Put your life at His disposal. Wonder of wonders, He can make us of you and me. It is through us that He is seeking to work out His glorious purpose for the world. He can transform the thin watery substance of your life and mine into rich wine that can be poured out in His service for the saving of desperately needy souls. Our unconditional obedience to Him will be rewarded greatly.

To those of you who are without eternal life, there are three things that Christ would have you do: realize your lost condition, repent of your sins, and receive Him by faith as your personal Saviour.

Robert Coyle, a member of the Air Force, was shot down in enemy territory, and for twenty-seven hours he dragged his body over rough ground trying to get back to his own lines. Finally, he was seen by some flyers and was rescued. He was brought to a field hospital. He made no request for a doctor, but began asking at once for a chaplain. Some months before the chaplain had tried to lead him to Christ, but could not. The boy was engrossed in the world and cared nothing for his salvation. The chaplain came to his side. Both of them were conscious that the time was short. The soldier begged the chaplain to explain to him the way of salvation. As carefully and simply as he could, the chaplain showed him the way through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and Christ as our substitute for sins. The boy listened carefully.

After a while he said, "I crawled twenty-seven hours to get back here so you could tell me how to be saved." He accepted Christ and peace came into his heart.

Finally, he said to the chaplain, "I want you to sing one of the songs mother used to sing out of the hymn book before time for church on Sunday morning." He mentioned the name of the song, and the chaplain ran back to his own hut to get a book with that song in it. He was back in a few moments and began singing to the boy. As he started, the soldier said, "Yes, that's the one," and the chaplain, excusing the roughness of his voice sang,

"Come ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love, and power.
He is able, He is able:
He is willing: doubt no more.

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him:
This He gives you,—This He gives you;
'Tis the Spirit's glimmering beam.

"Saints and angels join in concert,
Sing the praises of the Lamb,
While the blissful seats of Heaven,
Sweetly echo with His name.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Sinners here may do the same."

The chaplain thought for a moment that the boy had passed away. Everything was quiet. Then he saw the boy's lips move, and coming closer he heard him say, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Sinners here may do the same!"

Repent of your sins and believe on this loving Saviour now. Then, come and confess Him as we sing.