

Your Obedience Matters

1 Kings 17:8-24

- What is the first thought that pops into your head when I say the word “obedience”?
 - I think of taking a dog to obedience training to teach it how to behave.
 - Maybe you think of a child obeying its parents, doing what she is told to do when she is told to do it with a happy heart.
 - Both of those are somewhat negative concepts, though, aren’t they? We aren’t dogs, and we aren’t kids—we shouldn’t have to obey anyone because we are adults!
 - Whether we like it or not, God calls us to obey Him.
-
- Last week, we began looking at the life of an ordinary guy named Elijah.
 - In the book of James, the Bible describes him as a man with a nature like ours, yet the stories we see of him seem extraordinary.
 - We will see him raise the dead, call down fire from heaven, and avoid death by flying out on a chariot of fire.
 - So, how did this ordinary guy do such extraordinary things?
 - It had nothing to do with Elijah and everything to do with the God he served.
 - Each of these stories demonstrates God’s power in ordinary people.
-
- We will continue to see the themes we looked at last week about trusting God’s Word and also God’s provision, but we see them in a different setting.

- Today, we are going to look at the actions of the people in this account, and we are going to draw out this main idea: **your obedience matters.**
- As we grow older, we have a tendency to get more and more isolated.
- I can take care of my own business, and so you need to take care of yourself.
- That mindset leads us to think that the only one hurt by our actions is us, which is often a risk we are willing to take.
- The events we look at today push back against that and show us that your obedience not only matters to you, it matters to those around you.
- Read the passage with me in **1 Kings 17:9-16**. We will eventually cover through **verse 24**, but we will stop at **16** for now.
- There are three main people in this passage: Elijah, a widow, and her son.
- As they interact, you see that their lives are closely intertwined.
- As God calls them each to step out in different ways, their obedience matters! If Elijah didn't obey, the woman and her son would likely have died. If the widow hadn't obeyed what God said, Elijah would have had to find provision somewhere else, and she and her son would still have died!
- You must be convinced that your obedience matters to you, to others, and to the Lord.
- Why? Because if you aren't convinced that it matters to the Lord and to you and to others, you won't be willing to face the three challenges we see in this passage that obedience to God brings.

1) Obedience puts us in uncomfortable situations.

- So far, everything God we have seen God tell Elijah to do has been uncomfortable, hasn't it?
- "Why don't you go stand up in front of a wicked king and tell him that there's going to be a devastating drought that will bankrupt the nation and kill off people, crops and livestock. After that, go hang out in the middle of nowhere while some birds bring you some food."
- Now, that has dried up, and God is calling him again to an uncomfortable situation.
- You see, he now has to walk to the complete opposite side of the country to the Mediterranean Sea.
- Not only that, he has to leave Israel and go a town called Zarephath, which is in Phoenicia, which isn't even in Israel!
- Not only that, but as we read in **verses 10-11**, he has to ask her to give him the last bit of food she has due to the drought that he had a part in bringing about!
- The widow is in an uncomfortable situation as well. A man she doesn't know has come up to her and asked her for water and food, both of which are in short supply because of the drought.
- Is there anything about this that seems fun?
- So, why does God do this? Why is He putting people He loves and who love Him in such difficult and awkward places?
- Because that's how He shows Himself strong.
- Look at all God does in this passage—he provides for Elijah, this widow, and her son, sparing all three from death during the drought.
- Not only that, there is a bigger purpose behind all this.

- Remember last week what we said about the nation of Israel and Baal worship? That he was worshiped as the storm god, and that Jezebel, who was queen over Israel, led Israel into worshipping Baal instead of the one true God?
- She is from Sidon...this region! This is the heart of Baal worship.
- So what is God doing in bringing Elijah there? To prove, once again, that He is more powerful than the false god Baal. Here, in Baal's backyard, God provides miraculously for the people who worship and honor Him.
- Do you see how our obedience matters?
- Even when we are put in uncomfortable situations; in fact, especially when we are put in uncomfortable situations, God has a great purpose to show Himself strong in ways and places He couldn't otherwise.
- When He calls us to obey Him, and it puts us in a weird place, we can trust He is up to something!
- The Apostle Paul found this out when God called him to keep serving in spite of a major struggle he faced. Here was what God said to Paul:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:9, NASB95)
- When God calls you into situations where you are out of your league and out of your depth, He is taking you into the sweet spot of His work, and He can show Himself to be the amazing God He is, displaying His power in ordinary people like me and you.

- Our obedience matters, even when God calls us to follow into uncomfortable circumstances.
- **Not only that, but obedience also challenges us by...**

2) Obedience leaves us with an unknown future.

- I want to slow down and look closely at this section for a minute.
- Can you imagine what this widow is going through?
- Her husband has likely been dead for a while now, leaving her with no money and no real source of hope.
- Remember, in those days, there were no government assistance programs for widows. In a famine, they would have been in the first group to run out of money and food, and they would be among the first to die.
- She wakes up and feels the stabbing pain in her stomach, since they haven't had a good meal in some time.
- She goes over, checks what is left in her jars, and realizes that there is only enough for one more loaf of bread.
- This is it—there is nothing left, and so from this point forward, she and her son are going to march slowly towards their deaths.
- Can you imagine that sense of dread?
- If you're a parent, can you imagine the horrific pain of knowing that you have absolutely no hope and can't provide for your child, and that you are going to watch him die slowly and painfully?
- Then, pick back up in **verse 10-12**.
- Some man comes and has the audacity to ask you for your last meal?!

- How would you have reacted?
- Many of us would have probably said something a little more colorful to Elijah than what she does.
- She simply calls it like it is.
- Did you notice something in her words, though? *"As the Lord your God lives..."*
- Despite being in the Baal's back yard, this woman knows that the God Elijah serves is living and active, so she even swears by His name.
- Elijah then comforts her with a promise from God. Read **verses 13-14** again.
- This is the moment where the rubber meets the road.
- We said last week that God's power works through those who trust His word.
- Now, we see again that this woman is called to obey, to trust, to follow a God she barely knows.
- She is faced with a "What if?" situation.
- If she goes home and makes this bread for her and her son, they will both die.
- But what if the God of Israel is really alive? What if this man Elijah is really His prophet, and what if God's promises are true?
- Have you ever stopped to entertain that question?
- You may be here, and you have grown up in church, heard the stories, and decided it isn't for you. You may not even be sure why you came this morning.
- You may doubt everything that this church says and stands for.

- Let me ask you: are you willing to doubt your doubts?
 - All of us are going to die one day; you don't have to have the Bible to see that.
 - All of us are striving to understand how we fit into this great cosmic puzzle.
 - What if God is real? What if the God of Israel is actually alive and active?
-
- Are you willing to follow Him into an unknown future? This lady had to make a choice, and she couldn't rationally be certain of how it would work out.
 - In fact, it wasn't logically or physically possible for the oil and flour in one jar to last for years.
 - Yet, look at **verse 15-16**.
-
- It did. Her obedience sent her into an unknown future. She couldn't predict it, she couldn't control it, and she couldn't know for sure how it would play out.
 - Yet, as an act of faith, she trusted in the God who cared enough for her to send a prophet from another country to stay with her.
-
- Yes, God was showing Himself stronger than Baal, but He was also showing Himself more gracious than any other by taking care of this hopeless, helpless widow.
 - He cares for our greater needs by sending His Son to die on the cross and be raised from the dead to give you new life; to meet every spiritual need you have and sustain you in the midst of every physical and emotional struggle you face.
 - Yes, following God into the unknown may feel crazy and scary, but He is completely worth trusting.

- It would be great if the story stopped there, wouldn't it?
- She trusted, God provided; the end.
- That's how we want life to be, isn't it? One climactic moment of obeying God, and smooth sailing from then on out.
- There was one more lesson God teaches us through this woman, her son, and Elijah.
- Obeying God, going into the unknown with Him, doesn't always go like we expect.
- **In fact, the last lesson we draw from this account is...**

3) Obedience confronts us with unforeseen problems.

- Read **verses 17-24**.
- This isn't how it is supposed to work, right?
- I do what I am supposed to, step out in faith, and it all comes together.
- That's what this woman thought..."Here I am, taking care of a prophet, and God responds by killing my son."
- She even blames herself in **verse 18**. We don't know what sin she was convicted of, but she thinks it must be her fault.
- Do you ever struggle with that? "God, this isn't how it is supposed to be. I have been praying and reading my Bible. I even told someone about Jesus the other day and invited them to church. Why am I fighting with this struggle or why is this situation not working out?"
- Elijah cries out and intercedes, and God graciously restores the child to life.
- Why would God put someone through something like that?
- It almost seems cruel to kill a child and then go, "Haha...just kidding! He's all good."

- Look at her response in **verse 24**.
- God used this situation to confirm in her heart that Elijah really did represent God, and that she could trust his words.
- We would love for obedience to be a surefire promise that nothing will ever go wrong again.
- However, as we see here, that's not how it works!
- Yet, with the problems, God has a plan and a purpose.
- He is always at work, pointing people to Him through our lives.
- As we walk with Him, obeying Him, and honoring Him, He shows Himself strong, gracious, compassionate, and capable.
- All that brings us full circle.
- You see, your obedience matters.
- Obeying God make take you into uncomfortable situations, which is exactly where you need to be to help someone see God more clearly.
- Obeying God may turn your plans, hopes, and dreams upside down and put a huge question mark in your future, but He will fill in those answers in a way that grows you and honors Him, and in the process, He will work through your life to impact others.
- Obeying Him will bring you into all kinds of problems, challenges, and situations that set the stage to see Him work as only He can, allowing you to speak to hurts and challenges that others face in ways you never could before.
- Your obedience doesn't only matter to you; it matters to God, and it matters to others.
- Do you want to see His power working through your life? Choose to obey, whatever it costs.