**“Hard Obedience”**

Jeremiah 42:6 “Whether *it is* pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.”

The Jewish people have come to the prophet Jeremiah and they ask him to seek the Lord on their behalf to find His direction. They are seeking the Lord’s will. However, their request was insincere. They intended to obey the Lord only if He told them what they wanted to hear (ch 43). If the Lord’s will for them did not fit with their own desires and pre-conceived plans, they would figure out some way to explain it away and go their own way. Jeremiah knows this and rebukes them for it (vs 21-22). So he reminds them that whether the Lord’s will is “pleasing” or “displeasing,” they must obey the voice of the Lord (notice that obedience results in blessing- “that it may be well with us…”).

Now, why were they asking counsel from Jeremiah? Well, the issue that confronted them was an approaching enemy, the Babylonians. The leaders felt that the wisest move was to flee to Egypt for safety but the Lord tells them that if they remained in Judah He would protect them. If they fled to Egypt, He would judge them (vs 19-20). The message from the Lord was very clear. Stay and God will save you, leave and God will deliver you into the hands of your enemies. Despite God’s clarity, they choose to disobey and go their own way (Proverbs 14:12).

Unfortunately, this type of disobedience was not the exception, but the norm for much of Israel’s history (as it can be in our lives). Throughout the Old Testament, we see them consistently turning away from the Lord and going their own way, always to their own hurt. Not once did the decision to disobey the Lord result in joy and comfort. Every instance of disobedience brought about misery and pain. And even though the people knew God could save or judge them, they chose to disobey. They knew God had delivered them in the past and that He could deliver them from the Babylonians in the present (at least they knew this in their minds but it did not affect their hearts). Unfortunately, an intellectual knowledge of God’s power to save does not always translate into obedience. So what can we learn from this?

Observations About Sin and Obedience

1. Sin is irrational: The people knew God’s Word to be true and that they would be judged for disobedience and still, they disobeyed. Think about the Israelites years before as they stood at the bottom of Mount Sinai. They could see God’s presence enveloping the mountain. They had just witnessed the power of God through the plagues in Egypt. They had just walked through the parted waters of the Red Sea and still they choose to worship a golden calf that they had crafted with their own hands! They chose to worship an inanimate object rather than the living God! We engage in the same irrational behavior whenever we sin. We know that sin produces grief and pain but still we sin. We know that joy comes from obedience to Christ and yet, too often, we leave the path of joy and head down the road of grief.

2. Obedience is not always easy: Notice that Jeremiah tells them they must obey the Lord even if His will is displeasing to them. God often calls us to step outside of our comfort zones and engage in activities that we may not prefer. You may not feel comfortable witnessing to your neighbor or coworker. You may really dislike the idea of serving in the church. You may hate the idea of going to the mission field (like Jonah). But Jeremiah reminds us that we absolutely must obey the Lord, even when it’s hard. If God calls us to do something or go somewhere, we must respond in joyful obedience. Faithful obedience to God is the only way to truly “be happy in Jesus” (*Trust and Obey*).

Questions for Self-Examination

1. Do I pray for God’s direction with a heart that has no intention of obeying if it doesn’t fit my plans?

2. Am I currently resisting God’s will for my life in a specific area?

3. Am I willing to obey the Lord no matter how hard it may be (read Genesis 22)?

Charles Spurgeon “Do what the Lord bids you, where he bids you, as he bids you, as long as he bids you, and do it at once.”