

Roll Away the Stone



David Wilkerson (1931-2011) April 15, 2019

I'm convinced we can't fully obey God's Word until we understand why the Lord calls for perfect obedience. Why does God demand this? Is it because he's a despot, a tyrant who delights in placing heavy yokes and burdens on his people? No, not at all. Jesus tells us the burden he places on us is light and easy (*Matthew 11:30*). His commands aren't grievous.

So, does God demand perfect obedience because it appeases him in some way? Certainly not. Our obedience to his laws is not designed merely for his pleasure. God isn't looking to satisfy something in himself by seeing us obey his instruction.

Yet our perfect obedience to him does have to do with his pleasure. He has great pleasure when he sees the fruit that our obedience produces. Our Lord is like any father: he loves to see his children blessed and maturing as a result of their obedience to his instruction.

Under the Old Covenant, Israel's obedience resulted in good fruit and many tangible blessings for them: "You shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days" (*Exodus 23:25-26, NKJV*).

Great fruitfulness was the reward for Israel's obedience. God said when they obeyed his commands, they would receive tangible, material blessings. They would see increases in their livestock, vineyards and crops. They would enjoy good weather, fine clothing, nice homes and personal security. Their obedience would also result in powerful spiritual blessings, including manifestations of the Lord's glory.

Yet, unbelievably, Israel chafed under God's law. They kicked against the very commands designed to make them strong, victorious and prosperous. It was clearly meant for their benefit, but they resented it!

In the New Testament, some of the Lord's most devoted followers questioned his directions to them.

The disciples had every reason to question one of Jesus' directions: "After this He said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?'" (*John 11:7-8*). The disciples couldn't believe what Jesus was asking of them. The last time they were in Judea, the people there tried to kill him. No doubt they would try again, if he went back now.

Christ answered them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up" (*11:11*). The disciples' response? "Lord, let him sleep! Why wake him? Sleep is good for a person. If Lazarus is sleeping, he's getting healthy!" (*see 11:12*). Then Jesus explained to them that Lazarus had died. This must have confused the disciples even more. Why step back into danger if Lazarus' battle with illness was already over?

Their Lord had given his followers a clear word, a definite direction. Yet the frightened, confused disciples came up

with any number of excuses why they shouldn't obey it. Obviously, they saw danger ahead, both for themselves and their Master. Thus, they saw no point to what Jesus was asking.

Many devout Christians today react the same way upon hearing a seemingly absurd direction from the Lord. Sometimes the Holy Spirit tells us something that isn't contrary to Scripture but that we simply don't understand. We think, "That can't be God speaking. It has to be my flesh, my own thoughts." We quickly find a convenient passage to counteract the direction. Yet all along, it's the Holy Ghost trying to get through to us, all for our own blessing.

What Jesus said to his disciples next has profound meaning for us today.

Jesus explained to his followers, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him" (11:15). Christ was telling them, "I'm glad I didn't go when I was called to Lazarus' bedside. I had a reason for delaying, and that reason has nothing to do with Lazarus. Rather, it has to do with you, my friends. It's all for the purpose of purifying your faith. I'm about to put you face-to-face with the greatest impossibility ever known to humankind. And to face it, you're going to need great faith."

Jesus knew his disciples had seen people raised from the dead—they had watched as he healed a young girl who had been dead for at least several hours. But he also knew that his disciples had never seen anyone raised up who had been dead for four days, with the body already beginning to decay. Likewise, their unbelief now was a hindrance to the faith he wanted for them.

We see this demonstrated in the reaction of Martha, Lazarus' sister, when Jesus finally arrived. She said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (*John 11:21*). Martha believed Jesus could have offered help when there was still some visible life left in her brother. She trusted he could heal a half-dead man but not one who'd been dead for four days.

I believe Martha embodies the attitude of most Christians today. We accept that God can perform miracles for us when there's still a little inkling of hope left in our situation. But what happens to our faith when the Lord brings us face-to-face with absolutely impossible circumstances that demand his supernatural, miracle-working intervention?

Martha questioned her Lord's ability to work a miracle for her brother. Similarly, the disciples doubted his power to deliver them from the threat of death in Judea. No one gave the Lord credit to perform the impossible. In every instance, they had no faith whatsoever that he could meet them in their situations.

We come now to what I call "the crisis experience."

Our crisis comes when the Lord begins to deal with us about something in our life that has to go. It's a bondage we carry year after year, never enjoying deliverance from its dominion. It clings to us like the graveclothes of death. To perfectly obey our Lord, we are to lay this bondage down, to set it aside and walk in freedom. Our clinging to it is a sign of our unbelief. We don't trust in the Lord's ability to bring the fruit of life from our obedience to his word.

The fact is, he has supplied us with all the power and resources we need to obey him perfectly through the presence of his indwelling Spirit. "If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (*Romans 8:13*). Lazarus represented more than a dead body. He speaks to us today of two things:

Lazarus represents the chains, bondage and stench of death. He's a symbol of the darkness that enshrouds the hopeless burial of freedom. Paul might easily have been referring to Lazarus when he wrote, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (*Romans 7:24*).

Lazarus in the tomb also represents the revelation of Jesus Christ. He's a picture of the glory of God manifested before all humankind, a person totally set free from the dominion of sin. He represents resurrection life and freedom from the death-grip of controlling bondages.

For many believers today, there remains a crisis. A great stone stands in the way, and it is unbelief. At Lazarus' tomb, Martha protested, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days" (*John 11:39*). Many Christians today have adopted this kind of thinking about their own bondages. They convince themselves, "This sin

has attached itself to me for too long. I've tried to break free from it, but all my efforts have been in vain. This sin has too great a hold on me."

No! God's revelation to you of his resurrection life lies in that tomb, all wrapped up in unbelief. Right now, Jesus is saying to you the same thing he told his disciples: "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (*John 11:40*).

When Jesus came to Lazarus' tomb, he cried out, "Roll away the stone!" With these few words, he was saying to us all, "Do you want to see deliverance, to be set free? I've made a covenant with you. Now, roll away the stone. Get rid of your unbelief. It's all within your power to do so."

He didn't summon an angel to remove the rock. He commanded human hands to do it. When they did roll it away, it was as an act of faith, and they saw the glory of God. Out came Lazarus, with all the wrappings of death dropped from his now-living body.

Today, when you roll away your stone of unbelief, Christ's resurrection power is released in you. With a mere word from the Lord, all the rags of self-effort will be removed from you. You'll leap for joy as a testimony to the world, crying, "Lord, your word is always true. With you, nothing shall be impossible!" Amen.

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