

THORNS & THISTLES — WEEK 5

OBEDIENCE LEARNED IN THE FIRE

Suffering Trains Us to Say Yes to God

Texts: Hebrews 5:8; Philippians 2:8

SERMON MANUSCRIPT

INTRODUCTION

A lot of people love the idea of obedience until obedience costs them something.

We like obedience when it feels clear.

We like obedience when it feels blessed.

We like obedience when it opens doors.

We like obedience when it gives peace quickly.

But what about when obedience hurts?

What about when saying yes to God means walking through misunderstanding?

What about when saying yes to God means surrendering comfort?

What about when saying yes to God means staying faithful in a painful place?

What about when obedience does not immediately feel rewarding, but costly?

That is where many believers get tested.

Because obedience is easy to talk about in theory.

It is much harder to live when fire is involved.

And that is the burden of this message:

Suffering often becomes the classroom where obedience is learned most deeply.

Not because suffering is good in itself.

Not because pain automatically makes people holy.

But because hardship exposes whether our obedience is rooted in love and surrender, or only in convenience and outcomes.

Anybody can obey when the path is easy.

Anybody can say yes when the cost is low.

Anybody can follow Jesus when nothing is being threatened.

But when the will of God leads you into pressure, delay, loss, humiliation, sacrifice, or pain, that is where obedience stops being a slogan and becomes discipleship.

Tonight I want to show you three truths:

Jesus learned obedience through suffering

Suffering reveals whether our yes to God is conditional

Obedience in the fire forms Christ in us

And my prayer is that by the end of this message, you would not just admire obedience as a biblical concept, but submit to it as a way of life, even when it costs.

Because in the kingdom of God, obedience is not proven by what you say when life is easy.

It is proven by your surrender when life gets hard.

MAIN POINT 1

JESUS LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH SUFFERING

Hebrews 5:8

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”

This verse is one of the most striking verses in the New Testament.

It says that Jesus, though He was the Son, learned obedience through what He suffered.

Now we need to handle that carefully.

This does not mean Jesus moved from disobedience to obedience.

It does not mean Jesus was sinful and had to improve morally.

Jesus is the sinless Son of God.

He is perfect in holiness, perfect in righteousness, perfect in submission to the Father.

So what does it mean that He “learned obedience”?

It means He came to know obedience through lived experience in His humanity.

He did not merely understand obedience as divine command.

He lived it out in real human suffering.

He obeyed not only in theory, but in pressure.

Not only in holiness, but in hardship.

Not only in principle, but in pain.

That is what makes this so powerful.

Jesus did not stand far off from the cost of obedience.

He stepped into it.

He obeyed when He was misunderstood.
He obeyed when He was rejected.
He obeyed when He was betrayed.
He obeyed when obedience led Him to Gethsemane.
He obeyed when obedience led Him to the cross.
That means obedience for Jesus was not abstract.
It was embodied.
It was costly.
It was tested.
And that is why He is such a faithful Savior to us.
He does not merely command obedience from a distance.
He has walked the road of costly submission Himself.
That is why when you suffer in the path of obedience, you are not walking a road Jesus cannot understand.
He understands the weight of saying yes to the Father when that yes hurts.
He understands the agony of surrender.
He understands the tension of costly faithfulness.
He understands what it means to obey in tears.
This is also important because it destroys a shallow view of spiritual maturity.
Some people think maturity means never struggling.
Some think maturity means obedience should always feel natural and easy.
But Jesus shows us that holy obedience can be deeply painful without becoming sinful.
Pain does not mean obedience is absent.
Sometimes pain is the very context where obedience is being expressed most purely.

Application

Some of you are in a season right now where obedience feels heavy.
You know what God has said.
You know what faithfulness requires.
But the path in front of you is costly.
It may cost your pride.
It may cost your comfort.
It may cost your timeline.

It may cost your preferences.

It may cost your reputation.

It may cost your emotional ease.

And because it hurts, you are tempted to think something must be wrong.

But Hebrews 5:8 gives you another lens.

Sometimes suffering is not proof that you missed God.

Sometimes suffering is where obedience is being learned most deeply.

That means the pain of obedience is not wasted.

It is training.

It is formation.

It is discipleship.

Preaching Line

Obedience is not only learned in revelation. It is learned in suffering.

MAIN POINT 2

SUFFERING REVEALS WHETHER OUR YES TO GOD IS CONDITIONAL

A lot of us think we are surrendered until obedience starts taking things from us.

That is when the real state of the heart gets exposed.

Suffering has a way of revealing whether our yes to God is truly surrendered or secretly negotiated.

Because many times, what we call obedience is actually agreement with God as long as the terms feel manageable.

“I’ll obey if it works out quickly.”

“I’ll obey if people understand.”

“I’ll obey if it does not cost too much.”

“I’ll obey if it fits the future I had in mind.”

“I’ll obey if I can still keep control.”

But the fire reveals what is really there.

When the path gets painful, conditional obedience starts showing itself.

Conditional obedience says:

“I will follow as long as I still like where this is going.”

"I will submit as long as I still get my preferred outcome."

"I will trust as long as life still feels understandable."

But real obedience says:

"Even if I do not understand, I will still obey."

"Even if it hurts, I will still trust."

"Even if the cost is real, I will still say yes."

This is what suffering exposes.

It reveals whether God is truly Lord, or whether we were only comfortable with Him while He was cooperating with our plans.

And that is why seasons of pain can be so spiritually revealing.

They expose idols.

They expose self-protection.

They expose fear.

They expose our addiction to control.

They expose whether our peace is rooted in God's character or in our circumstances.

This is why Gethsemane is such a defining picture of discipleship.

Jesus does not obey because the cup is easy.

He obeys because the Father is worthy.

That is the heart of surrendered obedience.

Not, "I understand it all."

Not, "I like how this feels."

Not, "This matches my preference."

But, "Your will be done."

That is the line that separates admiration from discipleship.

Anybody can appreciate God's will when it feels aligned with their own.

A disciple learns to obey when God's will cuts across comfort, timing, control, and ease.

Application

Some of you are not just in pain.

You are in a place of revelation.

God is showing you what is still too attached in your heart.

Maybe your obedience has been tied to success.

Maybe it has been tied to affirmation.

Maybe it has been tied to quick results.

Maybe it has been tied to being understood by other people.

Maybe it has been tied to comfort and predictability.

And now that suffering has touched your life, God is exposing what kind of yes you have been living with.

This is not to shame you.

It is to free you.

Because God does not expose conditional obedience to humiliate you.

He exposes it so He can deepen surrender.

So ask yourself honestly:

If following Jesus costs more than I expected, will I still obey?

If God's will stretches me beyond what feels comfortable, will I still trust Him?

If obedience hurts before it bears fruit, will I still say yes?

That is the kind of honesty suffering forces out of us.

Preaching Line

The fire does not create surrender. It reveals whether surrender is real.

MAIN POINT 3

OBEDIENCE IN THE FIRE FORMS CHRIST IN US

Philippians 2:8

"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

This verse brings us to the deepest expression of obedience in all of Scripture.

Jesus humbled Himself.

Jesus obeyed.

Jesus went all the way to death, even death on a cross.

That means obedience is not just about behavior.

It is about likeness.

The more we follow Christ in costly obedience, the more Christ is formed in us.

This is the deeper work of suffering.

Suffering does not automatically make you like Jesus.

But obedience in suffering does.

When you choose trust over control, Christ is being formed in you.
When you choose surrender over self-rule, Christ is being formed in you.
When you choose faithfulness over comfort, Christ is being formed in you.
When you choose humility over self-protection, Christ is being formed in you.
This is why obedience in the fire is so important.
Because fire strips away illusions.
It burns through surface-level faith.
It exposes what is shallow.
It presses the soul into real dependence on God.
And in that place, something holy is formed.
Patience gets formed.
Humility gets formed.
Steadiness gets formed.
Perseverance gets formed.
Trust gets formed.
Christlike character gets formed.
Many believers want the image of Christ without the process that shapes it.
We want to look like Jesus publicly,
but we resist the hidden obediences that make that likeness real.
But Christlikeness is not formed mainly on platforms.
It is formed in private surrender.
It is formed when nobody claps.
It is formed when the answer is delayed.
It is formed when you keep obeying in pain.
It is formed when you stay low, stay faithful, and stay yielded.
And Philippians 2 shows us that the path of Christ is the path of humility and obedience.
The cross was not only where Jesus died for us.
It was also the fullest display of what surrendered obedience looks like.
So when we obey God in costly places, we are not just surviving hardship.
We are being shaped into the likeness of the Son.

Application

Some of you want God to remove the fire, and that is understandable.

But while you are asking Him to take you out, do not miss what He may be forming while you are in it.

He may be building a steadier yes in you.

He may be forming deeper humility.

He may be teaching you how to trust Him without visible results.

He may be cutting away a version of discipleship that only worked when life felt easy.

He may be shaping the character of Christ in you in a way comfort never could.

So do not waste the fire.

Do not only pray, "Lord, get me out."

Also pray, "Lord, form Christ in me here."

Because the goal of the Christian life is not mere relief.

It is resemblance.

Preaching Line

The fire may hurt, but if you obey God in it, Christ will be formed through it.

CONCLUSION

So what do we see in this message?

We see that Jesus learned obedience through suffering.

We see that suffering reveals whether our yes to God is conditional.

We see that obedience in the fire forms Christ in us.

This is the truth for every believer walking through a costly season:

Suffering is not only something to endure.

It is often something God uses to train your obedience.

That means the hard place may also be a holy place.

The painful place may also be a forming place.

The fire may also be a classroom.

Not because God delights in your pain,

but because He is committed to your formation.

And that means obedience is bigger than behavior modification.

It is surrender.

It is trust.

It is yieldedness.

It is saying yes to God when every part of your flesh wants to say no.

That is what Jesus did.

And that is what discipleship still requires.

Preaching Wrap

Obedience that costs nothing proves very little.

But obedience in the fire reveals who really rules your heart.

ALTAR CALL / RESPONSE

Tonight I want to call two groups of people to respond.

First, I want to speak to believers who are in a costly place of obedience.

You know what God has said, but saying yes has not been easy.

It has hurt.

It has stretched you.

It has exposed fear, hesitation, and exhaustion in your heart.

And maybe you have been asking, “Why is this so hard if this is really God?”

Tonight, I want you to hear this clearly:

The difficulty of obedience does not mean it is not from God.

Sometimes the cost is exactly where obedience is being learned most deeply.

So bring Him your resistance.

Bring Him your fear.

Bring Him your fatigue.

Bring Him your desire to control the outcome.

And pray, “Lord, I do not want a conditional yes. Form in me the kind of obedience that trusts You even in the fire.”

Second, I want to speak to those who do not know Christ.

The greatest act of obedience in history was Jesus going to the cross for sinners.

He obeyed the Father fully so that people like us could be forgiven, reconciled to God, and made new.

If you will turn from your sin and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, He will save you.

He will forgive you.

He will cleanse you.

He will give you new life.

This is your moment to surrender to Him.

FINAL CLOSE

Suffering may be the fire,
but obedience is the offering.

And when you keep saying yes to God in the pain,

He is not wasting the fire.

He is forming Christ in you.