

Obeying Jesus
May 8, 2016
Brian R. Wipf

Flooding in Texas has been in the news these last few weeks and it's been more than an inconvenience. Homes have been swept off their foundations; some have even lost their lives. You may recall the news story about a grandmother and 4 grandchildren drowning in their home when the flood waters came so swiftly and powerfully they couldn't respond in time. That's terrible news. You may remember how flood waters ripped apart roads and houses in the Lake Delton/Wisconsin Dells area in 2008. I found some footage of strong the flood waters were; take a peek at this video (VID).

I remember learning about the power of water in my college years studying civil engineering. A civil engineer has no bigger headache or obstacle than water. It's terribly destructive; a lot of money and energy is spent figuring out how to avoid the disaster done by water.

Our lives can be swept away into destruction just like those homes along the shores of Lake Delton. And remarkably, it can happen just as fast. You can spend years and years trying to put your life together just like you think you want it and it just takes a few silly, foolish, sinful decisions to throw it all away. Or it might be a terrible tragedy that makes you doubt everything you thought you believed. Jesus has words for us today about such things. He wants to help us. But part of that help comes with reworking the definition of a *follower of Jesus* or a *disciple*. But it's a change that will bring you life. So, to keep your life from being a house floating down the river, let's hear Jesus' words (READ Luke 6:46ff).

The opening words of Jesus are rather blunt; "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" We see in this Jesus redefining what it means to be a disciple. He's not being vague or confusing; he's being really clear. He's saying, "My followers do what I say. That's the true definition of a disciple. Someone who hears my words and does them." Jesus is comparing those who obey his words with those who don't in his parable about the flood waters and the houses. The person who built his house upon a solid foundation is described as one who heard the words of Jesus and did them. The person who built his house without a foundation is (look at vs. 49) "the one who hears and does not do them." That's the only difference between these two men. They both hear; the both apparently come to Jesus (Jesus says in vs. 47, "Everyone who comes to me and hears my words"). Only one difference is highlighted: one obeys the words of Jesus; the other one does not.

That's the difference between those who follow Jesus and those who don't. I'm reminded of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. He wanted eternal life; he came to Jesus. He had some success at keeping the rules. But when Jesus said, "But you still lack one thing. Sell all you have and give to the poor; then come and follow me" the rich man wouldn't. Vs. 22 says, "When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Followers of Jesus obey Jesus; they do what he says.

Friends, how are you tempted to define a follower of Jesus? How do you define *disciple*? We're tempted to put our own spin to it; we're tempted to define it the way we want. I'm a follower, a disciple of Jesus because I think about God some. I belong to this church. I'm a follower because I once made a faith decision. I'm a follower because I know I need Jesus. Those things don't make you a follower of Jesus and an heir to his promises. Jesus said something similar in Matt. 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who *does the will of my Father* who is in heaven." Those who do God's will are his followers and will enter his kingdom! You may know it, but are you doing it? A few chapters later in Matt. 12:50 Jesus said, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." There it is again! Whoever actually does God's will. Not the one who likes God's will, who wants to do God's will, who believes God's will is good. No, the one who does it.

Now, you may think, "But we are saved by grace, Brian, through faith. We don't get saved by our good works." You are right my good brother and sister; you understand the gospel well. Here's how this fits together: Jesus himself said in John 6:40, "For this is the will of my Father [so here is God's will that you need to do], that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." So, do God's will. Look on Jesus; believe in him and you will be saved.

But you don't think Jesus means, "Do this one time and then you don't need to do it anymore," do you? No, keep looking upon the son and keep believing in his words. That's what followers do. So, when Jesus says, "Be baptized," followers get baptized. When Jesus says, "Give generously to the poor and to the work of God," followers do that. When Jesus says in his word "meet regularly with your brothers and sisters," "prefer one another more than you prefer yourself," and "don't have sex with people who you are not married to" that's what followers of Jesus do. Followers of Jesus' don't believe his words one time (repent and believe for the forgiveness of sin) and then stop. They keep believing and obeying. Now, sure, we sin and we fall short; thank God for his forgiving grace. But followers don't look upon Jesus, hear his words and say, "Nah, I don't like those words, Jesus. I'm going to do what I think is best."

Let me ask again: are you a follower of Jesus? You know how to examine that, right? You know the test. Just ask yourself: Am I doing what Jesus commanded? Followers of Jesus obey his voice; am I doing that? The first words you must obey are these: "Turn away from your sins and your way of doing life and turn to Jesus and what he did on that cross for the forgiveness of your sins." But we keep obeying and we keep following. Friends, what has Jesus said, "Do this" and you're not doing it? Is it loving your neighbor? Forgiving somebody? Getting baptized? Maybe you rightly know that Jesus commands his people to serve one another in the body and you've just said no. It's one thing to fail at obeying Jesus' words well; it's another thing to say, "Not happening." You know the difference and you know which one you're doing.

What's interesting about these words from Jesus is that they conclude his teaching about doing the impossible; loving people like God loves you. I hope it's been established in

your mind that you can't do that. You can't forgive people like God forgives. You can't be kind to ungrateful and evil people. That's part of the point. God lovingly brings his children to the point of no return and says, "Ok, now you have to trust me." Faith in God is like a roller coaster. When you strap yourself in and take a ride to the top, there's no turning around. You don't get to the crest of the first drop off and say, "I think I'm changing my mind." You can't go back. Because what's back there? A life separated from God in hell; punishment for our sins. A life stuck in ugly habits of destruction and doom. Nothing to hope in when we die. When people started leaving Jesus because of the cost, he looked at Peter and said, "Are you going, too?" I love Peter's response. He said, "Where else can I go? You alone hold the keys of eternal life." That's what true followers see; there's no where else but with Jesus. Here's the deal, friends. Jesus is saying, "You can trust me. I'm leading you to the impossible. I'm leading you to the place where you have no other option, but me. But I'm enough for you; you can trust me." You see, it's about faith. Do you really believe in God? If you do, you will obey his voice.

Obedying the words of Jesus (which come from a radical belief that Jesus will do for you all that he has promised) is a foundation. Notice again that the only difference in the parable is the kind of foundation they have in life. Both men build a house; both men experience a flood. The only difference is that one had a foundation that was rock solid and the other one did not. Let me draw your attention to something because I want to preach for a minute: both men endured a flood. The parable doesn't say, "When you hear Jesus' words and do them, floods never come. And when you hear Jesus' words and refuse to do them, you get a flood." The flood comes no matter what.

I'm afraid there are many people who think that becoming a Christian is a way to avoid disasters and hardships in life. In fact, that's why some people come to Jesus. They come to Jesus with the hopes and even expectations that by doing so they will avoid the hard things in life. Now, you may wonder: Why would they think that? I'll tell you why: primarily - so not the only reason - primarily because that's what we've told them. That's the message that's coming out of so many Christian churches and groups. A popular main evangelistic strategy is to highlight the trouble and hardships of life and then lift up Jesus as our deliverer. But because we're not clear with the message or what gets lost in translation is that Jesus becomes our hope from trouble rather than our hope in trouble. He becomes a deliverer from the pain and heartache of life rather than a deliverer of the pain and heartache of sin. The Lord is our refuge and strength; an ever-present help in trouble. It's true, he is and it's glorious. But that's different than Jesus saving us from trouble where we don't need a refuge.

There are many reasons why making this clear is important, one of which is making sure our hope is fixed in the right place. Our hope is not in a trouble-free life. It's not in comfort or ease. The reason why this is so particularly dangerous for us is because this is such a prized value to Americans. We're so used to life being easy and comfortable, we love our trouble-free lives that we avoid hardships like the plague. Jesus is not against hardships; in fact, I think the scriptures want us to believe that hardships are good and necessary for us to grow and mature in our faith. God does not have the goal of making our lives easy and comfortable; he's not

trying to keep us from every possible flood. He brings the floods. And he knows exactly how to do that to mature and perfect our faith which is more precious than gold that's refined by the fire.

How is keeping Jesus' words a solid foundation? The parable doesn't say the foundation *are* Jesus' words. The words themselves are not the foundation in this story (though they certainly are a foundation). The solid foundation is *keeping* the words; *obeying* the words. What does that mean?

The most important way keeping Jesus' words are a solid foundation when the flood waters of life rise is that it's how authentic saving faith is proven true in your life; it's how you get assured in your standing with God. Friends, when your obedience to Jesus remains when the flood waters rise, your faith is shown as true and authentic. The men and I just studied Psalm 44 on Thursday morning. It's a challenging Psalm to understand. On the one hand, you have the author along with his faith community expressing strong faith and trust in God's power and might. The author exclaims, "you are my king!" It almost sounds like triumphant faith. Yet, half way through the Psalm the author says, "But God, you're letting us down. You made us a disgrace. You've sold us for a penny to our neighbors. You're letting our enemies win." And towards the end of the Psalm you can hear the confusion in the author. "What gives, God? We haven't turned from you. We're keeping the covenant. We haven't forgotten you. So, why is this happening?"

This psalm is a psalm of lament; a cry and complain to God. Something is wrong with the world and what's wrong with the world is expressed in prayer to God that seems wrong, too. It's an uncomfortable psalm because the author is pretty blunt, it almost sounds disrespectful to God. But the key moment in the psalm is towards the end because this is what the people say. They say, "God, Awake! Come to our help! Redeem us, God! Rise up!" Here's the point: they keep looking to God. They keep following his way. They remain obedient to his voice. That's faith. And that they would remain faithful to God in the midst of the storm demonstrates their faith in a deeper more profound way.

When you remain generous with your resources because Jesus says so even though you lose your job you are showing that your faith is real. When you have every reason to get even and hurt someone for the sins they have committed against you, but you don't because Jesus says you should forgive you are proving that God has indeed saved you from sin. When you step into the waters of baptism you are saying, "Jesus really is my Lord. I will do what he tells me." Obeying the words of Jesus in the storms have a way of affirming us in our faith. That's the point of Romans 5:3-4, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." We rejoice in sufferings, we rejoice in the floods because they begin this chain of events in a disciple's life that produces more godliness and obedience. And when we can see that obedience and godliness (that's character) we can say, "It's real! I really do believe in God! I really do trust in him! He's begun a good work and he's going to complete it." And that gives us a strong foundation to stand on.

The second way obeying the words of Jesus proves to be a foundation for us is in the day to day, practical experiences of life. The word of God, particularly the book of Proverbs, tells us that on the whole, more likely than not, when you do what God says you are more likely to avoid the troubles of foolishness and sin. Sooner or later, guess what catches us up to liars, cheaters, gossips, thieves and adulterers? Destruction. And the benefits and rewards of a life that hears and obeys God's word, the wisdom writer says, is honor and riches and life. Let's just be honest: one of the reasons life is such a wreck is because we've ignored the words of God. When that happens, things won't go well.

Now, you might hear that and say, "Wait a minute! Weren't you just telling us that it's wrong to tell people that Jesus helps us with our trouble and now you're saying obeying Jesus helps us with our trouble?" You're right, I was just saying that... kind of. The danger with false teaching, my brothers and sisters, is not that it's completely wrong, it's that it's not completely right. Or another way of saying it is that false teaching takes the truth and twists it just a little bit so it still sounds right, but still is a lie. Yes indeed obeying Jesus, following his way, helps us with the trouble we endure; it might even help us avoid some trouble or hardship. But it's no guarantee and avoiding the trouble is not the main goal. The main goal is more of Jesus and if Jesus brings the trouble I'm not going to curse him for that; I'm going to rejoice that he's a strong foundation for me in the midst of it.

Friends, I want this for me and I want this for you. I want us together to cling to and rejoice in the foundation God has for us. But that foundation is our own obedience of faith. It's our own obedience to the commands of God. But it's not our own obedience without the help of his grace. We can't do it alone. So, look to him; plead for more grace. Admit your shortcomings. But resist the temptation, my good brothers and sisters, to ignore the words of Jesus. To imagine that obeying is not necessary. Because if you do, you're just admitting you're not what you need to be, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Key Verse: Luke 6:47-48 ~ Everyone who come to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it.

Questions for the week

- How critical is obeying Jesus to your faith? How often do you contemplate and strive to be obedient?
- Does trying to obey feel like you're trying to earn your salvation? How do you avoid that?
- How has your thoughts on obeying Jesus' words changed today? Share that with a friend.