

Extraordinary Living: Lesson in Faith from Ordinary People

“Obedience Despite Circumstances”

Part 3

Intro: Many of you may know that Foothills runs and operates the Molalla Adult Community Center. What many of you may not know is how early on in this journey, God allowed circumstances to grow our faith. There were opportunities where we were either going to allow circumstances to dictate the direction or obedience.

- Share story about the early relationship with the County.
- Would we allow circumstances to drive our decisions or obedience?

When we obey despite the apparent impossibility of the circumstances, we experience His supernatural provision. (unlimited resources)

- Summarize the Feeding of 5000 – John 6
- This miracle of Jesus is so important all 4 Gospels record this event. It is obviously something we are to pay close attention to. It is apparent that obedience despite impossible circumstances is something God wants to impress upon His followers.
- Let me highlight 3 key truths from this story.

1. God uses circumstances to grow our faith

John 6:5-6 “Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?”⁶ He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.” (NLT)

- Circumstances reveal the depth of our faith

John 6:7 “Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!” (NLT) It’s impossible Jesus!

- Our response to apparent impossible or overwhelming circumstances reveals much about our relationship with God.
 - **Illustrate:** Use a tire pressure gauge – This measure PSI – explain. Circumstances and pressure can function like a gauge that can measure our faith – FSI – Faith per square inch. Sometimes it reveals we are a bit deflated in our faith.
 - If every time you encounter challenging circumstances and all you see are the reasons it is impossible, you have low FSI. I have encountered people like this all my life. They are the ones who are the quickest to point out why something can’t be done.
 - Are you facing some circumstances that reveal your FSI is a bit low? If so, consider this...
- Circumstances are simply the precursor to God’s agenda
“...for he already knew what he was going to do.”

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- Overwhelming circumstances do not indicate a disaster. God already knows what He is going to do. There is a plan. There is an agenda. There is a point and purpose. We are the ones clueless and confused but God is not.
- Choosing to believe that God has an agenda that we do not understand is part of the process of growing our faith.
- The impossible does not mean the absence of God. It is more than likely the precursor to His provision. How can we have the miraculous unless it is needed?
- We will always face challenges in our personal lives as well as the life of the church that give our faith opportunity to grow.
 - Talk about the future of our building project - \$3 million
 - This is so much more than a building project. Faith unleashes more faith. It doesn't matter where it is. When a church has the faith to buy and remodel a building, that faith unleashes more faith in other areas.
 - I am having conversations with people to start new ministries / I am seeing people trust Jesus with influence in the community / I am seeing God move like we have never seen.
 - This is why trusting God to finish the rest of the building is a big deal. It has little to do with the actual building and everything to do with our faith and trust in God. It increases our faith per square inch.
 - When you are exposed to a faith environment, your faith is impacted and you begin to exercise your faith in your personal life. If God can show up in my church then maybe I can trust God with my marriage / work stress / finances / etc...
 - You start seeing circumstances as the precursor to provision. That's faith!

2. God only uses what we have

John 6:8-9 "Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up.⁹ "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?" (NLT)

- God doesn't expect us to have all the resources necessary.
 - Jesus knew the disciples didn't have the resources to feed 10-15,000 people. He didn't expect them to problem solve that issue. He only wanted obedience with what they had.
 - We automatically think God wants us to problem solve. We tend to forget God already has the problem solved. He simply wants our obedience with whatever we have.
 - Often, we think our contribution is so insignificant we refuse to give / or do anything at all. We think it is the size of our contribution or effort that makes the difference when it is our obedience Jesus is asking for.

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- Some people may look at what is needed to finish our entire site plan for this church and conclude we do not have those type of resources in this church. That's irrelevant!
- Since we know / believe God is the One who put us in the building we choose to trust that He will problem solve everything we need for the journey. We simply need to be obedient with what we have. God has a way of multiplying things.
- Maybe you are looking at your overwhelming circumstances and conclude it doesn't matter what you do. Your efforts won't matter. The situation is too far gone / it's too overwhelming / your efforts are too insignificant.
- Remember, God is not asking you to fix it. He is only asking you to follow...only asking you to be obedient.

- Obedience moves our lives into the realm of the Kingdom of God

- Obedience is what aligns our lives to experience God's provision. It is obedience that keeps us living by the values of the Kingdom of God. Miraculous things happen when we live by the value of God's Kingdom.
- In our minds obedience seems so insignificant. BUT, in God's economy, obedience is everything. Jesus understood this. This is why Jesus said this:

John 5:19 "So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does." (NLT)

*John 12:49 "I don't speak on my own authority. **The Father** who sent me has commanded me **what** to say and how to say it." (NLT)*

- The key to Jesus' life was obedience to the Father. He only said and did what the Father wanted Him to do. He lived and spoke the values of the Kingdom. How can our lives be any less?
- This is why obedience to the word of God is so vital to experience the extraordinary. Obedience is not about God trying to control you. He is trying to show you how to live an extraordinary life.
- It is only in the realm of God's Kingdom where the miraculous happens. Until we align our lives with God's Kingdom, we are forever trapped in the natural...trapped in weakness...limited by this earthly kingdom. We settle for our resources instead of Kingdom resources.

Why is this so important?

3. God responds out of His unlimited resources

John 6:10-11 "Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.)¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted." (NLT) I love the extravagance of God's provision. I find it encouraging that God saw it was important to include the phrase; "and they all ate as much as they wanted..." the story also tells us there was 12 baskets left over. Abundance!

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- Obedience unleashes the unlimited resources of God

Notice how much power, strength and impact is promised to those who follow Jesus.

Eph. 3:16 "I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit." (NLT)

Eph. 3:20 "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think." (NLT)

- Our obedience unleashes Kingdom resources in any and every arena of life. These resources may be internal / relational / physical / emotional / financial / cognitive – wisdom /
- Our simple obedience exponentially increases the impact of what can be accomplished. *"To accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think."* This is what Kingdom results look like. Doesn't this phrase describe the story of the feeding of the 5000?
- Wouldn't you like that phrase to describe your life? Your church? Your community? Isn't this what transformation looks like?
- This helps us understand why disobedience is such a big deal. It's not about making God mad or angry. Our unwillingness to follow Jesus limits the extraordinary in this life. It cancels out the "infinitely more" that God wants to do through us.
- We are way to satisfied living from the results of our human resources rather than the unlimited resources of the Kingdom of God.
- Can you see why themes such as obedience / following / surrender are so important and why we talk about them constantly at Foothills? Without these becoming our reality, we limit what God will do in our midst. Without them, we limit what God will do in our lives.
- All too often people have conditional obedience. They follow Jesus when the circumstances are favorable and they do their own thing when circumstances are hard, overwhelming or when obedience is very inconvenient.
- We have to understand that obedience looks ridiculous when circumstances are overwhelming. Feeding 10-15K people with a sack lunch...? Ridiculous! Yet, it released the power of God.
- We must never forget this truth at Foothills. The best buildings and best programs do not create an extraordinary church. Only obedience following Jesus does. Without this, nothing supernatural will happen here. Nothing beyond human comprehension will happen.

Why is this so important?

- Obedience produces an undeniable testimony

John 6:14 "When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!" (NLT) This must be the Messiah!

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- The world is not impressed with what mankind can do. What leaves a testimony that is difficult to explain away is the miraculous provision of God.
 - People need to see Jesus and this only happens when Jesus is working...Jesus is moving...Jesus is providing. This only happens when His followers are obeying!
 - When Jesus said that His followers good deeds will be salt and light in this world, He was not referring to what we can accomplish in our own strength. He was referring to what we can accomplish in partnership with Jesus. This is what the world needs to see.
 - When Jesus said in John 15 that without Him we can do nothing, He is referring to Kingdom results. Results that leave a testimony to the unchurched world. Results that draw people to Jesus and make Jesus attractive.
 - Our community desperately needs to see an undeniable testimony of the reality of God. The best way we function as ambassadors for Jesus to our own community is to walk in obedience despite the circumstances.
- Where have you allowed the circumstances to erode your commitment to obedience? Maybe you struggle with circumstantial obedience? When things get tough, your obedience seems ridiculous to you and you try to figure it out on your own.
 - Just think about some obedience areas...
 - Serve when I have no time?
 - Give when I feel I have no money?
 - Forgive when someone wounded me deeply?
 - Love others even though they are mean to me?
 - Trust God even though I am filled with fear?
 - Wait for the right relationship even though I'm lonely?
 - Be ethical in business even though it seems it will hurt my business?
 - Keep my mouth shut and let God defend my reputation despite gossip.

How can you give God your simple obedience and despite the circumstance you're facing?
Will you surrender to obedience today?