

REVIVALISTS AND MYSTICS

THE JOY OF RADICAL OBEDIENCE: CLASS 3

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1. Why Radical?

- a. According to the Oxford Dictionary, “radical” is defined as “relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough.”
- b. This kind of obedience is more than just going through the motions or convincing the people around us of our godliness or fire. It’s the hidden obedience of the heart that is known only by God, who sees all.
- c. Four assumptions that threaten total obedience:
 - i. The assumption that outward actions = total obedience.

1 Samuel 16:7 “But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Jeremiah 7:22-23 “For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’”

- ii. The assumption that God’s prescription or path is the same for every person.
 1. God knows the secret places of our hearts. He knows the invitations that will most challenge our independence and distortions.. He is aware of the places where we are not surrendered. Our individual journeys of surrender will look very different because we are each unique and different.
 2. What he calls the rich young ruler to (Matthew 19) is different than what He calls Nicodemus to (John 3) who was also an influential man of status and wealth.

- iii. The assumption that the most extreme thing is automatically God.

1 Samuel 15:22 “And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”

1. Radical obedience is less about the intensity or extremity of the things you do and more about *total obedience* to the

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voice of God, whatever that may be.

- iv. The assumption that the easiest thing or the way of most blessing is automatically God.

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

- d. There is no formula. There is no rule book. There is only a man. We don't follow protocols but a person. We look to Him, we listen for His voice, We hear, and we follow in faith.
 - i. Sometimes our hearing and our following is so weak. But God is more concerned about the sincerity of our hearts than us getting it right 100% of the time.
- e. Our obedience can't be measured outwardly. A person can't look at another's actions and know the degree and the amount to which the other is being faithful and obedient to God.
- f. The real question when it comes to obedience is, **are you doing what Jesus Christ commands?** Yes, we all agree that there are general principles of behavior that are standard to all believers (justice, mercy, compassion). But beyond the general principles, are you specifically, walking in obedience to the voice of God as it relates to you personally and in the context of church community?
 - i. Radical obedience is going to touch every facet of our lives. It's going to touch our finances, our time, our decisions, our family, our vocation, our relationships.

John 10:27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (NIV)

Matthew 16:24 “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (NIV)

John 5:19 “Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (NIV)

- g. We cannot be wholehearted in our obedience to the Lord without relationship with Him.

Psalm 32:8-9 “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go: I will advise you with My eye upon you. 9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in

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check, otherwise they will not come near to you.” (NASB)

John 15:15 “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” (NASB)

Moment for Reflection: In what ways in this season do you feel God is calling you to unique obedience? What obstacles or resistances could prevent total obedience for you?

2. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

- a. G. K. Chesterton said of St. Francis, “He was a poet whose entire life was a poem.”
- b. Francis of Assisi is the originator of the popular saying, “Do all you can to preach the gospel and if necessary use words.” This was how he lived.
- c. Biographical Sketch
 - i. Francis of Assisi was born in late 1181, the son of a prosperous silk merchant in Italy. He lived a high-spirited life typical of a wealthy young man. He was handsome, gallant, delighted in fine clothes, and spent money lavishly. Despite this, his heart was drawn to the poor. In one account of this season of his life, Francis was selling cloth and velvet in the marketplace for his dad when he saw a beggar asking for money. At the conclusion of his business deal, Francis abandoned his wares, ran after the beggar, and gave him everything in his pockets. His friends and father mocked and scolded him for his recklessness (Wikipedia).
 - ii. Francis grew up during a time of constant warfare, when cities were continually fighting one another, and fame was to be achieved in battle. Around 1202, he joined a military expedition and was taken as a prisoner at Collestrada, spending a year as a captive. This was the first time he began to introspectively consider his life and the choices he had made. After being released, he went back to his extravagant ways.
 - iii. When Francis was about 25 years old, another war broke out between emperors and a professing pope. Like many other soldiers from Italy, Francis decided to join the papal armies. He

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spent a small fortune preparing the clothing, armor, and equipment he would need for battle, and then set out in haste towards Apulia, in southern Italy. Along the way he met a knight who was dressed in rags, and moved with pity, Francis removed the embroidered garments he was wearing and gave them to him. That night, after he went to sleep he had a dream. In the dream his father's house was filled with weapons and soldiers, and he saw a beautiful princess who was going to be his bride. When he awoke, he was momentarily filled with joy, but after some reflection Francis was troubled, because he concluded that the dream did not symbolize the earthly honor and glory he had longed for.

- iv. He journeyed on, though, and the next night he stopped at Spoleto. when St. Francis of Assisi heard the voice in a dream in Spoleto, "Francis, whom do you want to serve, the Master or the servant?" He answered "Master". Francis did not ask for clarification but simply obeyed that voice and from that moment on, his conversion began. While he slept he heard a voice telling him to go back to his own country, where it would be revealed to him what he should do next. The following day he returned to Assisi, where it became obvious to the people who knew him that he was a changed man.
- v. As was their custom, Francis' friends asked him to throw a party, and he did. He could no longer enjoy the carousing and drinking, and so, late that night, as everyone left the banquet hall, he began to pray. His biographer, Thomas of Celano, writes:

"Then it was that divine grace came upon him, enlightening him as to the nothingness of earth's vanities and revealing to him the invisible realities. Suddenly, he was inundated with such a torrent of love, submerged in such sweetness, that he stood there motionless, neither seeing nor hearing anything." In time he "lost all taste for business and gradually he was seen to withdraw from the world."

- vi. After this revelation nothing of the world could satisfy him and he could only find contentment in the things of God. Even though he did not yet know exactly what God was calling him to do, he began to spend his time in prayer and meditation, trusting that God would show him the way.

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- vii. He spent some time in lonely places, asking God for spiritual enlightenment. After a time, Francis had a mystical vision of Jesus Christ in the forsaken country chapel of San Damiano, just outside Assisi, in which the Icon of Christ Crucified said to him, "Francis, Francis, go and repair My church which, as you can see, is falling into ruins." He took this to mean the ruined church in which he was presently praying, and so he sold some cloth from his father's store to assist the priest there. His father sued him for the money, and in the resulting conflict, Francis renounced his family and his inheritance and committed himself to a life of poverty, having no possessions.

 - viii. Francis' example attracted others. He was so free and joyful, so free of all possessiveness and selfishness, that many many men and women rose up and followed in his footsteps. A gathering of like-minded men and women formed around him, and a simple order was created. They spent their time preaching the gospel, begging, and using the money to rebuild broken and ruined churches across Italy. Their one rule was "to follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps."
 - 1. St. Claire was a close spiritual friend of Francis who came from a similar background of wealth and honor. She renounced everything and led the women's division of the Franciscan order.

 - ix. Francis took the invitations from the Sermon on the Mount to live surrendered and free literally. He entrusted Himself totally to God's care and lived in the freedom and joy of being in the will of God for His life.

 - x. Francis of Assisi is well known for his love of nature, his tendency to preach not just to people but to animals and trees, and for miracles involving the taming of wild beasts and birds.
- d. Main Ideas
- i. Total open-handedness
 - ii. Renunciation of all possessions

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- iii. Total entrustment into the care of God
- iv. Care for the poor
- v. Freedom and Joy

e. Quotes

"My dear and beloved Brother, the treasure of blessed poverty is so very precious and divine that we are not worthy to possess it in our vile bodies. For poverty is that heavenly virtue by which all earthy and transitory things are trodden under foot, and by which every obstacle is removed from the soul so that it may freely enter into union with the eternal Lord God. It is also the virtue which makes the soul, while still here on earth, converse with the angels in Heaven. It is she who accompanied Christ on the Cross, was buried with Christ in the Tomb, and with Christ was raised and ascended into Heaven, for even in this life she gives to souls who love her the ability to fly to Heaven, and she alone guards the armor of true humility and charity." (The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi)

"Holy obedience confounds all bodily and fleshly desires and keeps the body mortified to the obedience of the spirit and to the obedience of one's brother and makes a man subject to all the men of this world and not to men alone, but also to all beasts and wild animals, so that they may do with him whatsoever they will, in so far as it may be granted to them from above by the Lord."

"Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to his beloved is that of overcoming self."

What do you have to fear? Nothing. Whom do you have to fear? No one. Why? Because whoever has joined forces with God obtains three great privileges: omnipotence without power, intoxication without wine, and life without death.

"Keep a clear eye toward life's end. Do not forget your purpose and destiny as God's creature. What you are in his sight is what you are and nothing more. Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take nothing that you have received...but only what you have given; a full heart enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice, and courage."

"A man who works with his hands is a labourer. A man who works with his hands and his head is a craftsman. A man who works with his hands, his head, and his heart is an artist."

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For Discussion: Which quote from Francis of Assisi stands out to you? Why?

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

a. Biographical Sketch

- i. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 in Germany into a prestigious, well-educated family. He had an early commitment to religion and had completed a Doctorate of Theology degree by the time he was 21. Bonhoeffer travelled to the United States for post-doctorate studies and spent a season in New York where he was significantly impacted by the vibrancy and resiliency of the African American church in the midst of centuries of oppression and suffering. This is the moment his faith moved from head knowledge to heart knowledge.
- ii. With the Nazi ascent to power in 1933, Bonhoeffer was part of a contingent of pastors in Germany who sought to oppose Hitler's regime. They formed the Confessing Church, a group of churches seeking to hold to truth against the rising tide of Nazism. The majority of the Church in Germany succumbed to Nazi beliefs and the watering down of the Christian faith.
- iii. Bonhoeffer led an underground seminary in Germany from 1935-1937 to train pastors in the Confessing Church movement. After it was shut down by Nazi forces, Bonhoeffer still secretly trained young pastors across Germany in values of Sermon on the Mount, Christology, and biblical doctrine.
- iv. As war drew near and persecution increased, Bonhoeffer's friends secured him a safe passage to America, where he would be protected during the impending war. In June 1939, Bonhoeffer left for the United States amid much inner turmoil. Once on the boat, he immediately regretted his decision to leave his beloved Germany. He returned to Germany two weeks after arriving in New York, despite strong pressures from his friends to stay in the United States.

"I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have

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no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people ... Christians in Germany will have to face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose but I cannot make that choice from security."

- v. Upon returning to Germany, Bonhoeffer served in a German military intelligence organization to avoid fighting for the Nazi party. There he served as a double agent, covertly continuing work of the resistance, being involved in a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler and involved in the rescue of many Jews from persecution. Bonhoeffer was ultimately arrested for his work and was executed by Nazi Germany in April 1945, soon before the war ended.

b. Main Ideas

- i. Supremacy of Christ over all
- ii. Total individual submission to the person of Jesus
- iii. The Call to Suffering as a part of Obedience
- iv. The call of the Church to live totally different from culture

c. Quotes

"[Discipleship] is nothing else than bondage to Jesus Christ alone, completely breaking through every programme, every ideal, every set of laws. No other significance is possible, since Jesus is the only significance. Beside Jesus nothing has any significance. He alone matters. (Cost of Discipleship, 58-59)

The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ. Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace. But those who try to use this grace as a dispensation from following Christ are simply deceiving themselves. (Cost of Discipleship, 51).

"From whom are we to hide the visibility of our discipleship?... We are to hide it from ourselves. Our task is simply to keep on following, looking only to our Leader who goes

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on before, taking no notice of ourselves or of what we are doing.” (Cost of Discipleship, 265).

Through the call of Jesus, men become individuals. Willynilly, they are compelled to decide, and that decision can only be made by themselves. It is no choice of their own that makes them individuals: it is Christ who makes them individuals by calling them. Every man is called separately, and must follow alone. But men are frightened of solitude, and they try to protect themselves from it by merging themselves in the society of their fellow-men and in their material environment. They become suddenly aware of their responsibilities and duties, and are loath to part with them. But all this is only a cloak to protect them from having to make a decision. They are unwilling to stand alone before Jesus and to be compelled to decide with their eyes fixed on him alone. Yet neither father nor mother, neither wife nor child, neither nationality nor tradition, can protect a man at the moment of his call. It is Christ’s will that he should be thus isolated, and that he should fix his eyes solely upon him. At the very moment of their call, men find that they have already broken with all the natural ties of life. This is not their own doing, but his who calls them. For Christ has delivered them from immediacy with the world, and brought them into immediacy with himself. We cannot follow Christ unless we are prepared to accept and affirm that breach as a *fait accompli*. It is no arbitrary choice on the disciple’s part, but Christ himself, who compels him thus to break with his past. (Cost of Discipleship, 94-95)

For Discussion: Which quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer stands out to you? Why?

4. For the Joy...

Hebrews 12:2 “ looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

James 1:2-4 “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

5. Last Words

"I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do. Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; seek what they sought."-Francis of Assisi

“This is the end—for me, the beginning of life.” -Dietrich Bonhoeffer