

Pastor Mark Mikels - February 27, 2011
"POWER UP!"

- Powerful Insights From Some Ancient Saints -
(Hebrews 11:8, 17; Genesis 12:1-5)

Intro ... This morning we continue in our little "POWER UP" series - a short series of message encouraging us to plug ourselves into some powerful insights discovered by some ancient saints.

Our theme verse for the series is Hebrews 11:1 ...

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."

And those commendations were based upon the particular "actions of faith" that each of those ancient saints took and it's those 'actions of faith' from which we draw these "insights for living powered-up lives".

Two weeks ago we saw that **Abel** ... 'offered a more pleasing sacrifice' and was commended.

Last week we saw that **Noah** ... 'moved by fear built an ark to save his family from the terrible earth-destroying Flood' and he was commended.

From each of these ancient saints we gained a powerful, life-affecting insight for living.

If we listen with the ears of our hearts, we can hear **Abel** say ...

"Give God what He wants -
present sacrifices that are pleasing to Him."

And from **Noah** would come this counsel ...

"Fear is one of life's most powerful motivators - don't ignore it.
It can help keep you on the straight and narrow!"

We find today's ancient commended saint mentioned initially in the 8th verse of this great Faith Chapter ...

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, *obeyed* and went, even though *he did not know where he was going*.

Obedience is the thing for which Abraham was commended here in Hebrews chapter 11 ... God told him to "pack up and leave" and he "packed up and left".

Drop your eyes down nine more verses (17) to see an even more incredible example of his obedience ...

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.

In response to the Lord's Command, Abraham laid his own son, Isaac (by then a fine young man), on the altar and raised the knife to take his life - He was prepared to obey an almost nonsensical command.

From those two instances from Abraham's life arises ...

Today's Power Insight ...

OBEYING God is the most important thing that you can do in this life for **OBEDIENCE** is vitally **CONNECTED** to every thing else.

So when His Word comes, **OBEY** it even if you don't fully **UNDERSTAND** it or think that you can actually **DO** it.

God needed Abraham to "pack up and leave" so an entirely new nation could emerge among men ... It would take over 400 years but the day would come when nearly 2,000,000 strong they would march out of Egypt on their way to the Promised Land.

God needed Abraham to face the sacrifice of his own beloved son so that he (and we) could understand something of the incredible sacrifice that the Father would one day make on Calvary's Cross.

Though Abraham did not live to see that day, he powerfully felt the urgency and the intensity of the moment that prefigured that day.

Surely in that moment (his moment) as he raised the knife over his own submitted son, he had to be repeating to himself over and over the thought of **Today's Power Insight ...**

Obeying God is the most important thing I can do in my life for obedience is vitally connected to everything else. I will obey His Directive even if I don't fully understand it or think I can actually do it.

The point is ... Without obedience we have pretty much nothing - or at least we have very little of the life God would have us enjoy during our sojourn here on earth. **On the other hand**, actions of obedience connect us with the fullness of that life.

This morning I would have us identify five of those vital connections - five connections that the Scriptures specifically identify.

These are **connections** that the ancients (and here I include New Testament saints as well) perfectly understood but that vast numbers of American Christians do not. See if they challenge any of your own understandings of Christian Living.

The first (and most comprehensive) of those five "connections" we can discover in the life of Abraham himself.

1. OBEDIENCE IS VITALLY CONNECTED TO BLESSING

"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'

'I will make you into a great nation and I will **ble**ss you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a **ble**ssing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you

I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be **ble**ssed through you.'

So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they

set out for the land of Canaan, **and they arrived there.**"

(Genesis 12:1-5)

God had some tremendous blessings in store for Abraham but that "store" was located nearly 1000 miles from his hometown. If he didn't agree to re-locate, he would not receive any of them!

Just like last week when we saw that the only way Noah's family could ever be saved was if he "*built the ark*" so here we see that the only way Abraham could ever experience the "blessings" that God promised was if he "*packed up his family and left*".

Well, he did and as a result he was ... He was 'blessed beyond measure'.

All through the Old Testament that "obedience-blessing connection" remained ...

God explained to the people as they came out of Egypt centuries later ...

"Now if **you obey** me **fully** and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Exodus 19:5-6

"If you follow my decrees and are careful **to obey** my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit."

Leviticus 26:3-4

But they didn't obey - They didn't enter in and take possession of the land.

They searched out the Promised Land and considered the inhabitants to be too powerful. The Command of the Lord seemed undoable and so they failed to obey and as a result they lost connection with God's Blessing and an entire generation perished in the wilderness.

40 years later - a new generation of Israelites stood on the edge of the Promised Land and the Word of the Lord came to them once again linking obedience and blessing together ...

"Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey **so that** it may go well with you

and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey,
just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you."

(Deuteronomy 6:3)

This time, under Joshua's leadership, they obeyed and the Lord blessed them everywhere that they went. They took possession of an incredibly abundant land and became a prosperous nation.

And as long as they continued to obey, they remained connected to the Lord's Blessings.

And through all the years that followed that connection continued. Obedience led to blessing and disobedience resulted in loss of blessing.

Long centuries later when the people were again in a state of dismay, God spoke to them through the prophet Jeremiah and said ...

"When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not *just* give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people.

Walk in all the ways I command you that it may go well with you."

(Jeremiah 7:22-23)

Today the "***Obedience-Blessing Connection***" still stands ...

God delights in blessing those who obey Him but He can not and will not bless those who don't - even if they are His Own Children.

Here's how the Lord Himself talks to His Church ...

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."

(Revelation 3:19)

Disobedient behavior is never over-looked ... Disobedient behavior brings the flow of blessings to a screeching halt. There's still a vital connection between ***Obedience*** and ***Blessing***.

It's not stretching anything to say ...

"If you want to know the fullness of God's Blessing upon your life, commit yourself to a life of Obedience."

But Obedience is not just connected to blessing - Today's "Insight" points out that Obedience is vitally connected to "everything else" ...

Now we obviously don't have time this morning to talk about "everything else" but we do have time to mention the connection between obedience and four other key aspects of our Christian Lives - four connections that are specifically identified in the Scripture itself.

For instance ...

2. OBEDIENCE IS VITALLY CONNECTED TO LOVE

Consider this verse ... John 14:15

"If you love me, you will obey what I command."

* Our Obedience follows naturally from Our Love for **HIM**

Those who love the Lord obey the Lord - that's what Jesus said. There's a vital connection between the two. The two are so connected that the absence of the one (obedience) casts serious doubt upon the presence of the other (love).

Now consider this verse in the following chapter ... John 15:10

"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."

* Our Obedience keeps us firmly placed in His Love for **US**.

As our love for Christ creates in us a genuine desire to obey him and as a life pattern of obedience begins to develop, we 'remain' in that realm where the Father's Love reigns supreme. We live with His Smile of Approval upon us and bask in its glow!

Obedience is vitally linked to **Blessing** and Obedience is vitally connected to **Love** - consider now thirdly that ...

3. OBEDIENCE IS VITALLY CONNECTED TO ASSURANCE

Consider these two verses ...

First, Romans 1:5 ...

"Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."

Paul says that the very "Call to Salvation" is a "Call to Obedience".

True faith results in lives of obedience. There's no getting around it. There's little reason to believe that you have been saved if there is not at least the desire to live a life of obedience to Christ.

Now consider this verse ... 1 John 2:3

"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands."

The Apostle John, writing at the end of his long life, with the perspective of one who had observed the first 80 or so years of church life and who had already seen a few "off the wall teachings" fighting for acceptance, links **assurance** powerfully to **obedience**.

Here's the point ...

The commands of Christ run absolutely contrary to the inclinations of human nature and to the patterns of the world and to the insinuations of the Devil ...

Therefore the desire to obey Christ is a pretty big tip-off that something has drastically changed within us ... To discipline ourselves to carry out those desires is further evidence that we are in fact His.

There's a vital connection between **Obedience** and **Assurance**; there's a vital connection between **Obedience** and **Love**; there's a vital connection between **Obedience** and **Blessing** and now consider that ...

4. OBEDIENCE IS VITALLY CONNECTED TO PRAYER

Once again the aged Apostle John is our source ... 1 John 3:21-22

"Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him."

Basically John is saying that we can pray with much more confidence when we pray with a clear conscience.

For the truth is ... a person with a clear conscience - a person who has been

living obediently - is much more likely to be praying in accord with God's Will and therefore is much more likely to be asking God for the very things that God desires to give.

Thus you can see there's a definite and vital link between *obedience* and *prayer* - particularly effective prayer.

And now for the final connection that we will discuss this morning ...

5. OBEDIENCE IS VITALLY CONNECTED TO FELLOWSHIP

Here's how John finished up his previous thought on prayer ...

1 John 3:23-24 ...

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those **who obey** his commands live in him, and he in them.

What a statement on fellowship. Obedience moves us right into the Father's house and moves the Spirit of God into a prominent place in our hearts.

This was actually a 80 year later follow-up to what Jesus himself had said to the disciples on that remarkable final night they spent together in the Upper Room ... John 14:23

"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching" (The obedience-love connection).

"My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him."
(The obedience-fellowship connection).

Fellowship - Prayer - Assurance - Love and Blessing - they are all vitally (and biblically) connected to ***Obedience*** ...

Is it any wonder that Abraham would say to us (and to himself) ...

Obeying God is the most important thing that you can do in this life for Obedience is vitally connected to every thing else. So when His Word comes, obey it even if you don't fully understand it or think that you can actually do it.

Final Thot ...

OBEDIENCE has always been the BOTTOM LINE

Not knowledge or pedigree or fine speech.
True ***FAITH*** always shows itself in ***OBEDIENCE***.