

***The Way x09. Sunday 03 March 2019.***

**The Way of Obedience.**

***READ: Hebrews 5: 7 -9 and Philippians 2: 5 – 11.***

**This year** we aim to see through our study and reflection on Scripture a clear thread of teaching and revelation about God showing **a way forward and a way through that we can follow** – whether we are journeying in an easy friendly place or the hostile wilderness.

There are prophecies in the **OT** about **GOD making a way in the wilderness (Isaiah 43: 19-21)** for his people. In the early Church “*the Way*” became a title describing the followers of Jesus - before the term Christian was used. We read of men and women who “*belonged to the Way*” (Acts 9:2; 22:4) because presumably of Jesus’ own claim in John 14 and in response to questions that he is the Way to the Father God – he is the way through the wilderness.

**In the wilderness** there are no pre-marked, tarmacked roads. The way through the wilderness is not obvious and must be discovered by journeying and perhaps listening to others and watching out for key marker stones that tell and show how others have crossed over and journeyed through. In a spiritual sense the way forward needs to be discovered by revelation every step of the way. The terrain in the wilderness is often hostile and by definition it is often a place of solitude. The wilderness is also in Scripture seen as a place where God can be encountered and heard and people empowered.

**We seek the Way of Jesus – to see how he lived his life.** The letter to the Hebrews tells us that the invisible God became human (2:6 *fol*) and that **Jesus learned obedience (Hebrews 5: 7 – 9) - made perfect (complete) through suffering (2:10).** Jesus’ obedience was tested. It was not that he was sinful before but that he was tested in life (e.g. in the wilderness) and was obedient to God’s righteousness and in resisting evil. Jesus was actively perfected through suffering. He lived for the glory of God (*John 17 Jesus said he glorified God on Earth. + Phil 2: 5).*

**According to the teaching of Philippians 2 we need to have the same attitude as Jesus – v8 “he was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death – his death on the cross”.**

The earlier part of the chapter is easier to read because vv1 and 2 speak positively of the fact that our life in Christ makes us strong! His love comforts us! That we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit! And that we can show kindness and compassion to one another! All of that is essential and greatly encouraging and I can say that I’m finding it to be true.

**But it is also true** that walking the Jesus Way means to walk like Jesus a road that is **marked with sorrow and suffering**. The human experience includes joy and suffering but also the “empathetic human experience” means v4 that as we look out for the interests of others as well as our own, we will enter into further suffering. Jesus totally

lived his life for others and entered fully into humanity's suffering. We will share with Jesus *the fellowship of his sufferings (Philippians 3: 10)* for humanity and creation.

**The idea of obedience has never been a popular one in any generation – essentially it is part of human nature to favour self and my ego.** The self, the ego is important and God affirms again and again in Scripture that he knows each of us by name and we are of worth and value and loved by him **BUT also the Bible is clear that this need to favour self and to go my own way – is the very essence of what “sin” is (me or I in the centre of sln). – In me there is a waywardness that is often contrary to what is God's right way.** Jesus is held up and indeed himself declares that he is the Way to be, to live, to please God.

As believing Christians we claim to be listening for the voice of God through the Bible, through the Spirit internally so that we may follow and do what God wants. That sounds somewhat easier and pleasanter than – **learning obedience through suffering.** (*JOB 1: 27. Song: Blessed be You Name of the Lord – Matt Redman*).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTpTQ4kBLxA>

**Last week we spoke on “the 2 ways” and the need to make choices – The point was that our choices will determine whether we experience “life or death, blessing or curses”.** There are consequences to our choices. One way is wide and travelled by the majority and the other is God's way which is narrow and only a few find or choose it. This week's talk takes that train of thought a bit further. – Jesus learned by his human experience the way of obedience to God's Spirit...by implication the normal human life includes choices as to how we will live – will we live to please ourselves or will we live to choose to please God by doing what pleases God.

**Jesus' very nature and attitudes were tested** – his nature of selflessness and humility was put to the test – not just for 40 days in the wilderness but on many occasions. Not just during his Passion and suffering on the “way of the cross” but on every occasion when the disciples were too proud to wash one another's feet and he had to do it, when people moaned and complained, when he was tired and exasperated, when people tried to trap him and catch him out, when they criticised him and accused him falsely of being a glutton and a drunkard, when they criticised him for showing kindness to the Samaritans or to women or other marginalised people in society. Jesus' very nature and attitudes were tested when he was taunted – he probably was tested to come down off the cross and teach people a lesson, but he didn't, although it was within his power to do it. Jesus was tested when he was desperate for peace and solitude and people in need followed him round the lake to find him – but he didn't turn them away and insisted that they were taught and also fed because they were hungry. In his perfect, sinless humanity he learned obedience by being tested.

**We have believed in and received Jesus into our lives** – and we are far from being perfect and sinless – and we are also called upon by the Spirit within us to become like

Jesus (predetermined) by choosing and learning obedience – also I believe through struggle and also suffering. **This “fullness of life” that Jesus promises us (John 10: 10) is only full because it includes not just joy but also sorrow and suffering.** “Fullness of life” includes not just being alive physically and mentally but having our spirits awakened to feel sorrow as well as joy – to be fully human. Jesus has awakened my capacity to feel and truly empathise as only God can feel and empathise. (*Hinds feet in high places. Hannah Hurnard.* Classic allegory of “Much Afraid’ s” journey accompanied by 2 guides “Sorrow and Suffering”.)

**As we walk in the way** that God makes – **we will be tested, and our character and attitudes are remade** – slowly very slowly and deeply. Paul’s argument (*read vv10 and 11*) *And so in honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Isn’t this what we pray for and are urged to seek? I think it is – if the church is to grow and the people of God grow then – we want people openly, voluntarily to fall on their knees and say – “Jesus Christ is Lord”. We want all of creation to give glory to God – rather than live for itself!

**“JESUS always had the nature of God”** – but in humbling himself and living as a human he showed us how to live. He did not please himself but lived for others by living for the Father God. Jesus has come to live within us to change our actual character and attitudes. He gives us the Spirit to enable us – **our actual nature to be rewired by the Holy Spirit within as we learn and choose to obey the Spirit.** Our bodies individually and as the body of the church are pictured by God as houses where God comes to make his home. (*John’s Gospel*).

**Being tested is essential.** If a house is electrically rewired – there should be a ripping out the old and a total replacing with new power sockets, lights, wires, consumer unit. But the job is not complete until everything is tested to show that all the lights and power works and everyone else can see the light and the power in operation. That’s the sign to the world that the house has been rewired and the power is up and running.

Whatever conditions exist on the outside or the inside of the house the house continues to give power to those inside and light to those inside and a witness to those outside. Christians will only be seen to shine and be the light of the world when they themselves and the world face darkness.

**God wants to rewire us according to Paul writing to the Philippians:** God will rewire us and install love, oneness in soul and mind amongst us. Selfish ambition and a cheap desire to boast when seen – he will remove. Instead he will rewire us to behave humbly and think more highly of one another than we do of ourselves. We will start to look out for others interests and not just our own. We will be more like Jesus.

We learn from Jesus and the Spirit, and from the good and bad examples of others. This learning will take time. We choose to let God rewire our mind, our emotions, our

heart and value systems. In the course of this there is a lot of ripping out of old and dangerous wiring – wrong ways of thinking and acting.

This is the Way that God makes! It is a way of not just of joy but also sorrow and suffering. Jesus was obedient to the Father – all the way. This is the only way we too are called to follow.

***Blessing prayer:***

***May we walk in the Way of Jesus according to the truth he has revealed. May we choose the life that he offers on the way of obedience.***

***We pray for strength for the journey and right relationship with all we meet this week on the road.***

***We ask for grace to make the choices with humility. We ask that we may always engage with the world and not walk by on the other side.***

***We are within the love of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.***