

Baptism Service

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These short verses of scripture concern Jesus' family. Jesus asks quite a profound question, "Who is my family?" In Luke themes come up and get developed. The big theme has been 'listening' until chapter 8 when the emphasis moves from hearing to doing. James tells us that if we are hearing but not doing we are deceiving ourselves. You may be fooling some other people but you are certainly not fooling God. "Now Jesus' mother and brothers

came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." (8:119-21) There are two different parts to obedience. You have to hear what God is saying to you and you have to walk in what he is saying to you. You have to put it into practice. You have to live it. The whole point of the Holy Spirit is to translate God's word into the rest of your life and into eternity. If you get stuck on not putting the words into practice, your life won't change, you won't be redirected into that narrow path that Jesus talks about. You have to get on the path and then you have to walk it. This passage is all about hearing and doing.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice". Are you listening to the Shepherd? Are you one of his sheep? There are so many obstacles to hearing God's voice in the first place and then following through in obedience. Jesus said, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." (v21) Some people stumble over the fact that Mary and Joseph had more children after Jesus was born but we are talking about flesh-and-blood brothers. Some of them went on to be apostles and leaders in the church. If you read the other accounts of this event we could say Jesus' family was not in a good place with God. I think it is fair to say that the Christian life is not a constant. It is more realistic to say we have seasons: dry seasons, flourishing seasons and seasons of disobedience. Mary and his brothers were not understanding Jesus as he needed to be understood. They were out of step with the Spirit. Jesus is not denying the physical human bond between himself and his mother and brothers. He is talking about his spiritual family. One of the things that your spiritual family does is to encourage your spiritual obedience. They will help you to listen, they will help to clarify the truth in Jesus Christ. They will help the word of God live for you and apply it to your life. Sometimes they will correct you if you are moving away from the path. We are not talking about the heavy-handed cult thing but a family that will hold you to account and keep you moving along the path.

At this moment Jesus is doing exactly what he is supposed to be doing. He is preaching the Kingdom amongst the lost sheep of the House of Israel and calling them to repentance and faith. He is fulfilling the scriptures that were written about him and making his way to the cross. Your physical family and friends are really important. They have a place in your life but when anyone or anything at any point seeks to over-step the line and move you away from your obedience to God, then there is a problem. God is God and his word and will must be first. God is not God if he occupies some lesser place other than the highest place of all. That is what it means to be God. He is to be Lord of all. When someone says stop doing that and come and prioritise me over that, the answer must be 'no I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing'. This sounds like a rebuke to his family but it is a warning to everyone who was there.

You are sitting here listening to this but are you hearing it? Is serving God going to be your life? Will you encourage each other like a family, a spiritual body that supports and helps each other to do the will of God? That is what church is meant to be; not just to hear but to do the will of God. I am sure Jesus loved his mum and his brothers but loving others does not always mean

doing what they say as they say it and when they say it if they are going to take you away from your obedience to God. God First! That is the Christian life.

It is helpful to see what an obedient life looks like so let's go back to chapter 7:28 and look at John the Baptist. Jesus says there isn't anyone else greater than John. This is Jesus' definition of a truly great person. He is so obedient! All his life he has been working out all the prophecies about himself in an incredibly courageous and costly way. He has been faithful to the ministry to which he has been called. Even before he was born his parents were told he would be great in the sight of the Lord. And in chapter 7 the Lord says that John is indeed great. He has lived up to the word of God about him. He called people to repentance, to turning from sin to righteousness and God's will because the Messiah was about to appear and he wants them to be ready to meet Jesus. God blessed his ministry. If you were not baptised by John you didn't receive Jesus. If you were, you did. "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)" (Lk 7:28-30) So much rested on hearing and doing what God was saying through John. John was saying, clean your hearts out and wash your bodies so you will be ready to meet the king when he comes. The word pharisee has gone down in history as a bi-word for legalistic disobedience: godliness without its power. Tax-collector has become a bi-word for a broken people who understood the reality of their sin and came in repentance and faith and were saved. The world has been divided into the sheep and the goats. There will be joy and there will be weeping and wailing on that great day when the world will be ripped in two. If you listened to John and did what he said you ended up in the right relationship with Jesus. Obedience matters.

"...none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." John's greatness was not that he hung out with the rich and the famous but that he associated with those whom others avoided. He got involved in the mess of life and was concerned for all manner of people. He was humble. Obedience looks like someone who is Christ-centred, bold in their service, honoured by the Lord which they carry with incredible humility. Hopefully we see some of those qualities in each other.

How much more then, is Jesus humble, interested in the smallest, the weakest and the uncared for. John was given the great honour of going before the Lord and yet how great is Jesus in the sight of God whose voice shook the heavens, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" God has raised him up and seated him in the highest place, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, at the right hand of God the Father. There is no greater honour. And yet here he is the most humble, meek servant of God. His call to us is to repent and believe... If John's baptism was so effective in helping his people to prepare for meeting Jesus then the baptism Jesus calls us to is powerful and effective for the turning to Jesus by the washing of your spirit and the washing of your body in preparation to meet God the Father. Are you ready to meet God? Every single one of us is going to meet our maker. Peter preached, "Believe and be baptised everyone of you." Don't be a hearer only but a doer. It's something you've got to do. It is not optional. It is a necessary preparation act of obedience. There are many times that we are called to obedience but this is primary.

Here we are. Hearing and doing. Barry's baptism prepares him for the whole of eternity. Life is amazing but we don't talk about Heaven very much because the Bible doesn't tell us a lot but it tells us enough, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Cor 2:9) You really want to be there so when you put your trust in Jesus, no matter what happens in this life, you will get there and nothing in Heaven or on earth can stop it.