

OBEYING CHRIST'S ORDERS

"His mother said unto the servants, Whatever He says unto you, do it."

John 2:5

IT does not need a strong imagination to picture Mary, probably at that time the widowed mother of our Lord. She is full of love and of a naturally kind, sympathetic disposition. She is at a marriage and she is very pleased that her Son is there, with the first handful of His disciples. Their being there has made a greater demand upon the provisions than was expected and the supply is running short, so she, with an anxiety that was natural to such a mother of her years, and of her gentle spirit, thinks that she will speak to her Son and tell Him that there is a need. So she says to Him, "They have no wine."

There was not much amiss in that, surely, but our Lord, who sees not as man sees, perceived that she was putting to the front her motherly relationship at a time when it was necessary that it should be in the background. How necessary it was, history has shown, for the apostate church of Rome has actually made Mary a Mediatrix and prayers have been addressed to her! She has even been asked to use her maternal authority with her Son. It was well that our Savior should check anything that might tend to give any countenance to Mariolatry which has been altogether so mischievous. And it was necessary for Him to speak to His mother with somewhat more of sharpness than, perhaps, her conduct, in itself, alone, might have required. So her august Son felt bound to say to her, "Woman, what have I to do with you in such a matter as this? I am not your Son as a miracle-worker. I cannot work to please you. No, if I work a miracle as the Son of God, it cannot be as your Son—it must be in another character. What have I to do with you in this matter?" And He gives His reason—"My hour is not yet come."

It was a gentle rebuke, absolutely necessary from the prescience of all that would follow. You can easily picture how Mary took it. She knew Christ's gentleness, His infinite love, how for 30 years there had never come anything from Him that had grieved her spirit. So she drank in the reproof and gently shrank back, thinking much more than she said, for she was always a woman who laid up these things and pondered them in her heart. She says very little, but she thinks a great deal—and we see in her later conduct, in respect to this very miracle, that she thought very much of what Jesus had said to her. Brothers and Sisters, you and I, with the very best intentions, may sometimes err towards our Lord. And if He, then, in any way rebukes us, and puts us back—if He disappoints our hope, if He does not allow our ambitious designs to prosper—let us take it from Him as Mary took it from Jesus. Let us just feel that it must be right and let us, in silence, possess ourselves in His Presence.

Notice, then, this holy woman's quietude, ceasing to say a word, quietly drinking it all in. And then observe her wise admonition to the servants who were there to wait at the feast. Inasmuch as she had run before Him, she would have them to follow after Him and she very wisely and kindly says to them, "Whatever He says unto you, do it. Do not go to Him with any of your remarks. Do not try to press Him forward. Do not urge Him on—He knows better than we do. Stand back and wait till He speaks, and then be quick to obey every single word that He utters." Beloved, I wish that when we have learned a lesson, we would try to teach it. Sometimes our Master gives us a sharp word all to ourselves and we would not tell anybody else what He has said. In our private communions He has spoken to our conscience and to our heart—and we need not go and repeat that, as Mary did not. But, having learned the lesson well, let us then say to our next friend, "Do not err as I have done. Avoid the rock on which I struck just now. I fear that I grieved my Lord. My Sister, I would not have you grieve Him. My Brother, I would try to tell you just what to do that you may please Him in all things." Do you not think that we would minister to mutual

edification if we did that? Instead of telling the faults of others, let us extract the essence from the discoveries which we make of our own errors and then administer that as a helpful medicine to those who are around us.

This holy woman must have spoken with a good deal of power. Her tone must have been peculiarly forcible and her manner must have made a great impression upon the servants, for you notice that they did exactly what she told them. It is not every servant who will let a guest come into the house and set up to be mistress. But so it was when she spoke to those servants, with her deep, earnest tones, as a woman who had learned something that she could not tell, but who, yet, out of that experience, had extracted a lesson for others. She must have spoken with a wonderful melting force when she said to them, "Whatever He says unto you, do it." And they were all looking on with awe after she had spoken, drinking in her message to them as she had drunk in the message of the Lord.

Now I want, tonight, to try to teach that lesson to myself and to you. I think that our own experience goes to show us that our highest wisdom, our very best prosperity, will lie in our cautiously keeping behind Christ and never running before Him, never forcing His hand, never tempting Him as they did who tempted God in the wilderness—prescribing to Him to do this or that—but, in holy, humble obedience, taking these words as our life motto henceforth, "Whatever He says unto you, do it." I will handle my text in this way—First, What? Secondly, Why? Thirdly, What then?

1. WHAT IS IT THAT WE ARE HERE TOLD TO DO? In a word, it is to obey. You who belong to Christ and are His disciples, take heed to this word of exhortation, "Whatever He says unto you, do it."

I want you to notice, first of all, that these words were spoken, not to the disciples of Christ, but to the servants who, in the Greek, are here called diakonoi, the persons who were brought in to wait at the table and to serve the guests. I know not whether they were paid servants, or whether they were friends who kindly volunteered their services, but they were the waiters at the feast. They were not told to leave their master. They were not told to give up their avocation as waiters. They were servants and they were to continue servants, but still, for all that, they were to acknowledge Christ as their Master without casting off their obedience to the governor of the feast. Mary does not say to these people, "Put down those pots. Leave off carrying those dishes." But while they continue to do what they were doing, she says to them, "Whatever He says unto you, do it." I thought that point was well worthy of our notice, that these servants, still abiding as they were, yet were to render obedience to Christ.

That obedience, in the first place, would be prepared obedience. Mary came to get their minds ready to do what Christ should bid them. No man will obey Christ on a sudden and keep on doing so. There must be a weighing, a considering. There must be a thoughtful, careful knowledge of what His will is—and a preparedness of heart—that whatever that will may be, as it is known, so it shall be done! At first these servants did nothing. The guests needed wine but the servants did not go to Jesus and say, "Master, wine is needed." No, but they waited until He bade them fill the waterpots with water—and then they filled them to the brim. But they did nothing till He bade them. A great part of obedience lies in not doing. I believe that in the anxiety of many a trembling heart, the very best faith will be seen in not doing anything. When you do not know what to do, do nothing, and, doing nothing, my Brothers and Sisters, will be found to be, sometimes, the very hardest work of all. In the case of a man in business who has come into a difficulty, or of a Sister with a sick child, or a sick husband, you know the impulse is to do something or other. If not the first thing that comes to hand, yet we feel that we must do something. And many a person has aggravated his sorrow by doing something, when, if he had bravely left it alone, believingly left it in God's hands, it would have been infinitely better for him.

"Whatever He says unto you, do it." But do not do what every whim or fancy in your poor brain urges you to do! Do not run before you are sent. They who run before God's cloud will have to come back, again—and they will be very happy if they find the way back! Where Scripture is silent, be you silent! If there is no command, you had better wait till you can find some guidance.

Blunder not on with a headlong anxiety lest you tumble into the ditch! "Whatever He says unto you," do that. But until He speaks, sit still. My Soul, be patient before God and wait until you know His bidding!

This prepared obedience was to be the obedience of the spirit, for obedience lies mainly there. True obedience is not always seen in what we do, or do not do, but it is manifest in the perfect submission to the will of God—and the strong resolve that saturates the spirit through and through—that what He bids us, we will do!

Let your obedience, in the next place, be perfect obedience. "Whatever He says unto you, do it." It is disobedience, and not obedience which prompts us to select from the commands of Christ which ones we care to obey. If you say, "I will do what Christ bids me as far as I choose," you have, in fact, said, "I will not do what Christ bids me, but I will do what I please to do." That obedience is not true which is not universal! Imagine a soldier in the army who, instead of obeying every command of his captain, omits this and that, and says that he cannot help it, or that he even means to omit certain things. Beloved, take heed of throwing any precept of your Lord upon the dunghill! Every Word that He has spoken to you is more precious than a diamond! Prize it! Store it up. Wear it. Let it be your ornament and your beauty. "Whatever He says unto you, do it," whether it relates to the Church of God and its ordinances, or to your walk out of doors among your fellow men, or to your relationship in the family, or to your own private service for the Lord. "Whatever." See, there are to be no trimmings, here, no cutting off of certain things—"Whatever He says unto you, do it." Breathe this prayer at the present moment, "Lord, help me to do whatever You have said! May I have no choice! May I never let my own will come in to interfere, but if You have told me do anything, enable me to do it, whatever it may be!"

This obedience, then, being prepared and perfect, is to also be practical obedience—"Whatever He says unto you, do it." Do not think about it, especially for a very long time, and then wait until it is more impressed upon you, or till there is a convenient season. "Whatever He says unto you, do it." One of the great evils of the times is that of deliberating about a plain command of Christ and asking, "What will be the result of it?" What have you to do with results? "But if I follow Christ in all things, I may lose my job!" What have you to do with that? When a soldier is told to go up to the cannon's mouth, he is very likely to lose his "job" and something else—but he is bound to do it! "Oh, but I might lose my opportunities of usefulness!" What do you mean? That you are going to do evil that good may come? That is what it comes to. Will you really, before God, look that matter in the face? "Whatever He says unto you, do it." At any expense, at any risk, do it!

I have heard some say, "Well, I do not like doing things in a hurry." Very well, but what says David? "I made haste, and delayed not—to keep Your Commandments." Remember that we sin every moment that we delay to do anything commanded by Christ. Whether every moment of delay is a fresh sin, I cannot say, but if we neglect any command of His, we are living in a condition of perpetual sinning against Him—and that is not a desirable position for any of Christ's disciples to live in! Beloved, "whatever He says unto you, do it." Do not argue against it and try to find some reason for not doing it. I have known some Believers who have not liked to have certain passages of Scripture read at the family altar because they have rather troubled their consciences. If there is anything in the Bible that quarrels with you, you are wrong—the Bible is not! Come to terms with it at once and the only terms will be obey, obey, obey your Lord's will! I am not holding this up to you as a way of salvation—you know I would never think of doing that! I am speaking to those of you who are saved! You are Christ's servants—His saved ones! And now you have come to the holy discipline of His house and this is the rule of it, "Whatever He says unto you, do it."

Do it practically. Have we not been talking too much about what should be done by our friends, or observing what others do not do? Oh, that the Spirit of God would come upon us that our own walk might be close with God, our own obedience be precise and exact, our own love to Christ be proved by our continual following in His steps! Ours should be practical obedience.

It must also be personal obedience—"Whatever He says unto you, do it." You know how much there is done by proxy, nowadays. Charity is done so. A is in a great deal of need. B hears of it and is very sorry, indeed. And so he asks C to come and help A. And then B goes to bed and feels that

he has done a good thing! Or else when A has told his story to B, B looks out to see if there is some Society that will help him, although he never subscribes to the Society because he does not think of doing that! His part is just to pass A on to C, or to the Society and, having done that, he feels satisfied. Do you wish the Savior to say, in the Last Great Day, "I was hungry, and you sent Me to somebody else," or, "I was thirsty and you directed Me to the parish pump for a drink"? Nothing of the kind! We must do something personally for Christ.

So is it in the matter of endeavoring to win souls to Christ. There is nothing like personally speaking to people, button-holing them, looking them in the eyes, talking your own personal experience over with them and pleading with them to fly to Christ for refuge! Personal obedience is what is needed. If one of these persons who were waiting had said, when the command had come from Christ to fill the waterpots, "John, you go and do it. William, you go and do it"—he would not have followed out Mary's command, "Whatever He says unto you, do it." Do I touch the conscience of anybody here? Well, if so, from this time forth cease to be a servant of God by proxy lest you be saved by proxy—and to be saved by proxy will be to be lost! But trust Christ for yourself and then serve Him for yourself, by His own mighty Grace—"Whatever He says unto you, do it."

It must also be prompt obedience. Do it at once—delay will take the bloom from the obedience. "Whatever He says unto you," stand ready to obey. The moment that the command, "March," is given to the soldier, he marches. The moment a command comes to your heart and you see it to be really in the Word of God, do it! Oh, the murdered resolutions that lie round about most men's lives! What they would have done! What they could have done, if they had but done it! But they have been building castles in the air, imagining lives they would like to lead and not actually doing Christ's commands. Oh, for a prompt, personal, practical service to the Lord Jesus Christ!

And in our case it is to be perpetual obedience. Mary said to these waiters, "Whatever He says unto you, do it." "Keep on doing it. Not only the first thing He says, but whatever He says unto you. As long as this feast lasts and He is here, do what my Son commands you." So, Beloved, as long as we are in this world, until life's last hour, may the Holy Spirit enable us to do just what Jesus bids us do! Can you say, my Brothers and Sisters—

*"Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave, and follow You"?*

Is it your wish that until you enter into His rest, you should always bear His yoke and follow His footsteps? Temporary Christians are not Christians! Those who ask for furlough from this Divine service have never entered it. We have put on our uniform to never take it off. As certain old knights in times of war slept in their armor and had the lance and shield always ready to hand, so must the Christian be, from this time forth and forever. "Ours not to reason why," ours not to delay when the command comes, but ours, while there is breath in our body, and life in our spirit, to serve Him who has redeemed us with His precious blood!

Thus I have feebly set before you what it is that we are called to do—that is, to obey Christ's orders.

II. Now for a few minutes let us ask, WHY IS THIS TO BE DONE? Beloved, why were these men to do what Jesus told them? Let that melt into, "Why are you and I to do what Jesus tells us?"

First, Christ is, by Nature, worthy of obedience. I count it an honor to serve Christ. Oh, what is He? Perfect Man, rising nobly above us all! Perfect God, infinitely majestic in His two Natures. Why, it seems to me as if we ought to love to do His bidding and long to be conformed to His image! Here is the rest for our aspiring spirit. Here are the glory and the honor and the immortality for which we pant! By the glory of Christ, whom you adore unseen, "Whatever He says unto you, do it."

Beside that, Christ is our only hope. All our prospects for the future depend upon Him. Glory be to His blessed name! There is none like He. If He were gone from us and we could not trust in Him, life would be an endless darkness, an abyss of woe! By all the glory of His Nature and all that

we owe to Him, and all that we look for from Him, I charge you, beloved Friends, “Whatever He says unto you, do it.”

More than that, He is All-Wise, and so fit to lead. Who but He could get these people out of their trouble at the feast when they needed wine? He knew the way out of it all—a way that would manifest His own Glory, make His disciples believe in Him and make everybody round about happy. But if He did not show the way, nobody could. So let us obey Him, for His commands are so wise. He never has made a mistake and He never will. Let us commit our way unto His keeping and whatever He says unto us, let us do it!

Besides, Beloved, Christ has rewarded our obedience before. Did you ever act rightly and, after all, find it a mistake? Some of us have had to do very grievous things in our time that have gone sorely against the grain. Would we do them again? Yes, that we would, if they cost 10 times as much! No man has ever, in looking back, regretted that he followed the voice of conscience and the dictates of God’s Word—and he never will, though he should even go to prison and to death for Christ’s sake! You may lose for Christ, but you shall never lose by Christ! When all comes to be added up, you shall be a greater gainer because of the apparent loss. He has never deceived you and never misled you. Obedience to Him has always brought you real solid peace. Therefore, “whatever He says unto you, do it.”

Yet once more, Christ is our Master and we must obey Him. I hope, Beloved, that there is no one among us here who would call Him, Master, and yet not do the things that He says. We do not talk about Him as one who was once great, but who is gone away and whose influence is now upon the wane because He is not up to “the spirit of the age.” No, but He still lives and we still commune with Him. He is our Master and Lord! When we were baptized into His death, it was no mere matter of form—but we were dead to the world and we lived to Him. When we took His sacred name upon us and were called Christians, it was no sham—we meant that He should be Captain, King and Master of our spirits! He is no Baali, that is, domineering lord but He is Ishi, our Man, our Husband and, in His husbandly relationship He is Lord and Governor of every thought and every motion of our nature! Jesus, Jesus, Your yoke is easy and your burden is light! It is joyous to bear it! To get away from it would be misery, indeed, and that is one reason why I say to you, tonight, “Whatever He says unto you, do it,” because if you do not, you cast off your allegiance to Him—and what are you going to do, then?

To whom will you go if you turn away from Him? Every man must have a master. Will you be your own master? You cannot have a greater tyrant! Will you let the world be your master? Are you going to be a servant of “society”? There are no worse slaves than these! Are you going to live for self, for honor, for what is called, “pleasure”? Ah, me, you may as well go down to Egypt, to the iron furnace, at once! To whom can we go? Jesus, to whom can we go, if we go away from You? You have the words of eternal life! “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.” Throw another bond of love about me, another cord of sweet constraint and let me never ever think of parting with You! Let me be crucified to the world and the world to me!

Do not your hearts pray after that fashion? Oh, to be wholly Christ’s, entirely Christ’s, forever Christ’s! Yes, yes, we will listen to the command, “Whatever He says unto you, do it.” I have given you the reason why we should obey Christ’s orders.

III. And now, Beloved, let me occupy the last few minutes in answering this question, WHAT WILL FOLLOW FROM THIS OBEDIENCE? Suppose we do whatever Christ commands us, what then? I will tell you what then.

The first thing is, that you will feel free from responsibility. The servant who has done what his master has told him, may, in his own mind, fear that some dreadful consequences may follow, but he says to himself, “It will be no fault of mine. I did what I was told to do.” Now, Beloved, if you want to get rid of the whole burden of life, by faith do whatever Christ commands you! Then, if the heavens should seem about to fall, it would be no business of yours to shore them up. You have not to mend God’s work and keep it right. I remember what Mr. John Wesley said to his preachers—“Now, Brothers, I do not want you to mend my rules. I want you to obey them.” That is

pretty strong from John Wesley, but from our Lord Jesus Christ it comes most suitably. He does not want us to get to altering, mending, touching up and looking at consequences. No! Do exactly what He tells you and you have nothing to do with the consequences! You may have to bear them, but He will give you Grace to do that—and it shall be your joy to bear all ill consequences that come of firm obedience to Christ.

This kind of doctrine does not suit the year 1889. If you go over to Scotland and see where the Covenanters' graves are, anybody who thinks according to the spirit of this age will say that they were just a lot of fools to have been so stubborn and so strict about doctrine as to die for it. Why, really, there is not anything in the new philosophy that is worth dying for! I wonder whether there is any “modern thought” doctrine that would be worth the purchase of a cat's life? According to the teaching of the broad school, what is supposed to be true, today, may not be true tomorrow, so it is not worth dying for. We may as well put off the dying till the thing is altered—and if we wait a month, it will be altered and thus, at the last, you may get the old creed back again! The Lord send it and send us yet a race of men who will obey what He bids them, do what He tells them, believe what He teaches them and lay their own wills down in complete obedience to their Lord and Master! Such a people will feel free from responsibility.

Then you shall feel a sweet flow of love to Christ. The disobedient child—well, he will not be turned out of the house because he will not do the bidding of his mother and father. But when he does not submit to the rule of the house, he has a hard time of it and he ought to have. There is that evening kiss, it is not as warm as it would have been. And that morning greeting, after long disobedience, has no happiness in it. And, indeed, the more kind father and mother are, the more unhappy he is! And the sweet love of Christ is such that it makes us unhappy in disobedience. You cannot walk contrary to Christ and yet enjoy fellowship with Him. And the more dear and near He is to you, so much the wider does the gap seem to be when you are not doing His bidding.

Besides, there is no carrying out your faith except by doing as He bids you. That faith which lies only in a creed, or in a little pious book is not good for much. Faith does what Christ bids it do and it delights to do so! It rejoices to run risks, it delights to put off from the land and get out to sea. It is glad to sacrifice itself when Jesus calls for it because faith cannot be satisfied without bearing fruit—and the fruit of faith is obedience to Him in whom we believe.

Beloved, I also think that if we will obey Christ in what He says, we shall be learning to be leaders. Wellington used to say that no man is fit to command until he has learned to obey—and I am sure that it is so. We shall never see a race of really first-rate men unless our boys and girls are made to obey their parents in their childhood. The essential glory of manhood is lost when disobedience is tolerated and, certainly, in the Church of God, the Lord does put His leading servants through very severe ordeals. The best place for the books of a minister is not his library, but very often a sick-bed. Affliction is our school and before we can deal with others, God must deal with us. If you will not obey, you shall not be set to command.

And lastly, I do believe that learning to obey is one of the preparatives for the enjoyments of Heaven. Why, in Heaven, they have no will but God's will! Their will is to serve Him and delight themselves in Him. And if you and I do not learn, here below, what obedience to God is, and practice it, and carry it out, how can we hope to be happy in the midst of obedient spirits? Dear Hearers, if you have never learned to trust Christ and obey Him, how can you go to Heaven? You would be so unhappy there that you would ask God to let you run to Hell for shelter, for nothing would strike you with more horror than to be in the midst of perfectly holy people who find their delight in the service of God! May the Lord bring us to this complete obedience to Christ! Then this world will be an inclined plane, or a ladder such as Jacob saw, up which we shall trip with holy gladness till we come to the top and find our Heaven in perfect obedience to God!

It is not Mary who speaks to you, tonight, but it is the Church of God, the mother of all who truly love Christ, and she says to you, “Whatever He says unto you, do it,” and if you will do it, He will turn the water into wine for you. He will make your love more glad and happy than it ever would have been without obeying Him and He will provide for you. Obey Him and He will comfort you.

Obey Him and He will perfect you. Be with Him in the ways of duty and you shall be with Him in the home of Glory!

The Lord grant this, of His infinite Grace, giving to us to know the will of Christ, and then working in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure! Amen and Amen.