

Commitment - the reward of faithfulness

Part 1

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[00:00:00] 1 Corinthians 9 verse 24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?

So run, that ye may obtain.

And every man that striveth for the masteriest temper it in all things, now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beateth the air, but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away.

Moreover brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, that all our fathers were under [00:01:05] the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our example, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them, as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

[00:02:03] Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will within temptation also make a way to

escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

[00:03:04] When we read the life of the Apostle Paul, consequent upon his conversion, we are under no doubt that here was a man who was thoroughly committed to the interests of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who allowed nothing to stand in his way to fulfill the commission that the Lord gave to him.

That's why I read that small portion in chapter 9, where he gives the figure of a race, many might run in the race, but only one receives the prize.

Now the Christian testimony is not a sphere of competition, we're not trying to see who's the best brother or who's the best sister, that's not the point, it's the figure of a race where every nerve is strained to get to the finishing line first.

It's thorough committal, one desire in the mind and heart and will, single-mindedness, [00:04:09] and that certainly marked the Apostle Paul. And again, he uses the figure of a boxer, he doesn't beat the air and miss his punches, he selects his punches with skill and power and makes sure that they count. Then he is seeking to be the winner.

Now he says, I don't want to be rejected, I don't want to be a castaway, I don't want to serve the Lord and yet do it in a fleshly way or for self-desire, self-aggrandizement, I want to do it with a clear mind, a clear conscience, so that the Lord comes first in my life and in my service, and that what I do may be for him and for his glory. What an awful thing it would be, after I've preached, I should be a castaway or should [00:05:02] be rejected. Now I don't think the question of the sole salvation is here, that's not the point, it's a question of service and perhaps not doing it properly and the service being rejected. You might say, well is that possible? Well yes.

For instance, in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we find that two men were selected to take the place of Judas Iscariot.

They both had exactly the same qualifications.

The qualifications were they had to know all about the Lord Jesus from the day of his baptism until the day he ascended to the right hand of God. And those two brothers, they had those qualifications. The disciple says, now we cannot possibly try and sort this matter out ourselves, we'll cast a lot and we'll cry to the Lord to indicate to us who is the person to be chosen. [00:06:05] In the book of Proverbs, we find a statement like this, the lot is cast in the lap of the Lord and he makes the decision. That might not be the exact quotation, but it's very near. And so the disciples, they did this.

And the Lord selected one and he rejected the other.

We don't know why he rejected the other and there's no good speculating. But the fact is that one was rejected, although outwardly he had all the qualifications. I think this is the application here. There was some reason why this other man was disqualified from occupying the place of a disciple.

This dear friends is what is bearing in upon my mind this evening to show that not only do we have knowledge, thank God for every bit of knowledge that we possess of the word of God, but we require something more. [00:07:02] We require faithfulness. I trust we will see this before we are finished with this portion in chapter 10. You would notice from verse 1 to verse 4, I emphasize in reading that little

word, all.

It's mentioned about five times, I think, all our fathers, all passed through the sea, all were baptized, all ate the same spiritual meat, all drank the same spiritual drink. This indicates to me the sovereignty of the blessing of Jehovah with his ancient people, Israel.

He blessed them in such a wonderful way, not because they were faithful, not because they were obedient, but because this was his mind.

He heard their cry in Egypt, he came down to deliver them and he took them out of Egypt [00:08:01] with divine power and by his redeeming arm.

And then he delivered them from the power of the enemy and they passed through the Red Sea in triumph.

And then he fed them with the manna, good solid food, the manna. We said this quite often and we say it again, the proof that it was good, solid, nourishing food was seen in Caleb where after 40 years feeding upon manna, he says, I'm as strong today as I was 40 years ago.

That's all he ate, manna.

Good indication that that was worthwhile food. And along with that, they were refreshed day by day by the rock that followed them, which was Christ. Well then, we can see clearly in all those statements, the hand of God in sovereign blessing because it was his will to bless them and how wonderfully they were blessed. [00:09:04] Now when we come to the section that follows, we find a sad story.

It's not all, not by any means.

We find that many die in the wilderness. Many hundreds, thousands are slain because of their rebellion. There's a change here. It's a question of faithfulness, a question of committal to the will of God and that's what we want to emphasize in this passage.

In verse 5, it says, but with many of them, God was not well pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now, it doesn't say he wasn't pleased with all of them. He wasn't pleased with many of them, which means there were some who were well pleasing to the Lord.

We read the account of this in the book of Numbers. [00:10:03] You remember the 12 spies were sent into the land to investigate, spy the land and to bring back a report for the nation.

Well, they did that and they came back with the report that it was a good land.

That wasn't very surprising, was it? [00:11:03] God had said it was a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. But they came back with the evidence of it. It was a marvelous land, a good land, all that God had said it was. But ten of them said, oh, cities walled up to heaven, giants there, we'll never be able to take this land. But Caleb and Joshua, they stilled the people and they said, we are able, not thinking for one moment that they were able in themselves, but they had confidence in God, that what God had promised, he was well able to perform.

And so we find in the dark background of failure in the mass of the people, there are two who come forward, Caleb and Joshua, and God credits them with this wonderful testimony.

[00:12:03] They wholly followed him.

They didn't in any way turn aside from the declared purpose of God. This was the challenge, this was the issue. Would they go in and take possession of the land as God had purposed? Unfortunately, they didn't. Well then, God says, I'm going to pass judgment on all those who came out of Egypt, all the males from a certain age, they'll all die, they'll all perish in the wilderness journey. But the younger generation, they will go in, and Caleb and Joshua, because they wholly followed the Lord.

When you live a little time in the Christian testimony, in the few years of experience behind you, your mind goes back over many, many who started out on the pathway of Christian testimony, and for one reason or another, gave up.

[00:13:04] That's very, very sad. Worse too, if they gave up completely and go into the world.

Might be they settle for a lower testimony that is somewhat beneath the declared purpose of God.

Well, we're thankful at least for that. Oh, how sad to see how many have dropped out of the declared will of God in connection with his purpose, not only for us individually, but collectively. I believe with all my heart that the reason is a lack of commitment.

If we are thoroughly committed to the declared will of God, difficulties, weaknesses, oppositions won't trouble us to the extent that we'll give up and say it's no use going on. We'll get strength to overcome those difficulties, whatever they might be, if we have a commitment. [00:14:08] But wherever that commitment is lacking, then we can be so easily turned aside. Oh, how often we've heard the statement and how true it is. It's the set of the sails that determines the course. And so we find these two men, Caleb and Joshua, they wholly followed the Lord, not thinking of their own way or their own desires, but a consuming desire to please the Lord.

Did they gain by it? It wasn't very easy for them with all the joy of the inheritance in their heart, with all the joy of the promised land that they had seen. And it was in their mind and in their heart. And for 40 years, they had to trudge along with a disobedient people until all that generation had died.

[00:15:01] But you never hear them grumbling. They accept God's government upon the nation. But what an honor, what an honor when we find in the book of Joshua and also told us in the book of Judges that Caleb was that strong. Give me this mountain, he said. I want this part of the inheritance for myself. This is what God promised for me. I want it.

And of course, he went with the strength that God gave him and he secured for himself that particular portion of the inheritance, mighty man Caleb.

And he had those who followed him who were like him. Joshua, chosen by God to lead the people into the promised land after the death of Moses, the servant of God.

They were honored, honored by God because of their faithfulness and their commitment. I know many dear souls, young, middle-aged, elderly, who are committed to the truth as [00:16:07] they feel

the word of God teaches them. And I know they're honored and I know they're blessed, a sound conscience, a clear mind and a settled will to do the things that please God.

Of course, each one must settle for himself and herself as to what is the will of God for them in their individual lives, in every way in their lives, whether it be in connection with business or marriage or anything at all.

The paramount claim of God upon them will reveal how far they are committed to it. I mean their answer to it. And so dear friends, it's a wonderful thing to be committed.

In Romans chapter 12, I believe Paul is urging the Roman Christians to make a committal.

[00:17:06] They were saved.

Paul had unfolded to them the righteousness of God in saving them and too had indicated how they were justified before God and many, many other blessings. No question at all about their salvation.

But Paul says in chapter 12, I beseech you by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God, which is your intelligent service. Not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may know what is that good and perfect and intelligent will of God. I may not be quoting it correctly, but that's the gist of it. What a wonderful thing then. This is what Paul wanted for Christians to do, not simply to be satisfied with their sins forgiven.

[00:18:01] My, that's a marvelous thing. I trust that everyone here knows what it is to be forgiven. Their sins gone and gone forever, forgiven, cleansed, pardoned, that's a marvelous thing.

But if we stop there, then we're falling short of God's declared will for us. Marvelous thing to know that we're justified, reconciled. He wants a thorough, total committal that the world doesn't push us into a certain form by us conforming to its ways, its politics, its principles, its entertainment, its sport, whatever you like to think about. The world is not allowed to push us into that certain form. We are committed to God and his will takes paramount place in our lives. I know it's easy to say that, but that's what God desires of you and me and every Christian. Again I say, oh dear Christian friends, what a wonderful thing it is to have in our sight [00:19:07] the purpose of God, the purpose of God, not what suits me. Oh, so very often today it's a question of what caters to my happiness, what caters to my desires, instead of what is the declared will of God for me, for my life, individually and collectively. Oh, may we all be followers of our God, followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What an honor. Men and women, they follow their heroes in this life, whatever their hero might be, or heroine.

Oh, how wonderful that we can follow the Lord of glory, poor and insignificant as we might be.

We can follow him and please him in this world. But a dear brother, not so very long ago, was taking part in the breaking of bread and [00:20:01] his heart filled up and among other things he says, oh Lord, you are our hero. Well we know what he meant. That came from his heart. It wasn't a nice honeyed phrase, correct theologically.

It was an outburst of appreciation from his heart and a good thing if we can carry that on in our lives day by day.

We come to the statement, it's verse 6, we don't want to miss it.

Now these things were our examples to the intent, we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

You see the word of God says these things that happened so long ago with the ancient people of Israel are a warning for us that we might not be like them. And we find four exhortations following this that we shouldn't be like them. And so we ought to pay attention to them because they're no good saying, oh that's Israel. [00:21:03] Someone has actually said, and Israel's God is ours, and Israel's failures are ours too. And so we have to be extremely careful that we don't criticize Israel and fall into the same kind of mistake.

And so we find in verse 7, neither be ye idolaters as were some of them.

As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

We read about this in the book of Exodus and you remember that Moses went up Mount Sinai and he received from God the two tables of stone, the law written by the finger of God. And as he came down the mount, Joshua heard the singing that was taking place in the camp and he thought it was a sound of victory. But Moses was able to tell him, no it's something different, it's alternate singing I hear. And then it was discovered what had happened in the absence of Moses. [00:22:05] The children of Israel, they got impatient.

They couldn't wait any longer. What's become of this man? Where has he gone to?

Has he left us? Has he forsaken us? Come on, he said to Aaron, make us a calf, make us a god. And Aaron took their golden earrings and all the other things of gold that they could give and he fashioned a golden calf.

The blasphemy of it, he said to the children of Israel, these be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee out of Egypt.

Isn't it awful to think that those people who had experienced the hand of God in taking them out from the bondage of Pharaoh should bow down to a molten calf, something that had been shaped by Aaron's hands, and attribute to that all the blessing that they had received [00:23:02] from the hand of Jehovah himself.

What a shame, what blasphemy, we might almost say what ignorance.

And this is the sad feature that brought down the wrath of God upon that scene. When Moses came down and saw the awful thing that had happened, he took the two tables of stone and he smashed them, smashed them to the ground. If he had taken them into the camp, it would have brought instant judgment. And then we find, directed by God, he gets the call for judgment to take place.

Who is going to stand beside Moses? And we find that the tribe of Levi committed itself to what was of God and said they would be prepared to stand.

And later on, all those who were on the Lord's side, they went out to Moses to the tent. [00:24:03] But

here was one particular tribe that was thoroughly committed to the interests of God and would allow nothing to interfere, nature or anything else, to hinder them in taking part in God's declared judgment on those idolaters. What an awful thing.

How right it was that judgment should enter into that scene. If you read it carefully, you'll find that 3,000 souls were slain in that day under the judgment of God. Praise God, when we come to the day of Pentecost, the day of grace, we find 3,000 souls converted. Not judgment.

Why? Because the judgment had been born. Man of God had borne all the judgment that was necessary to be born, and so the good news went out far and wide, 3,000 souls saved on that memorable day.

[00:25:02] Oh, how wonderful the grace of God.

But here in the midst of difficulty, and it was difficult, all the nation were happy to take part in this idolatry.

Who's going to stand for the Lord? You look at this great company, thousands and thousands and thousands of them. Who's going to stand for the Lord? Easy to be frightened. We're very, very much in the minority. One tribe out of 12 tribes, but Levi didn't hesitate, and Levi was faithful.

If you turn to Deuteronomy chapter 33, you will find there that Levi is credited with blessing, wonderful blessing, an honored place in the system of approach to God, as we find the Levitical tribe is chosen, Aaron the priest, the high priest, and the sons divided into three families, and oh, how wonderful that was, that their faithfulness was repaid. [00:26:01] Yes, my dear Christian friends, faithfulness to God is always honored by God.

He will always see to it that blessing follows those who are faithful to him. No matter how dark the day, no matter how difficult the day, God in his wondrous grace will see to it that those who are faithful to him will be blessed in the way that he sees best.

Well, you say, idolatry?

That's something that we don't need to be worried about. Think again.

We find in the writings of the apostle Paul that he says covetousness, which is idolatry.

If you go back into the book of Samuel, 1 Samuel, you remember the judgment that the prophet put upon Saul, the king, and told him that self-will is as idolatry.

[00:27:07] Now, there are two moral features, or should I say immoral features. Covetousness, idolatry.

Self-will, idolatry.

So we have to be extremely careful that we think that idolatry is only connected with stocks and stones. I know the principles of idolatry can be clearly seen as we subject ourselves to our own covetous desires, lusting after other things.

Lust in the Bible doesn't always mean depraved forms of lust, it's just desires, desires after anything at all that would hinder us in our pathway in this world. Covetousness and self-will. I don't need to tell you people here that self-will is something that dogs our footsteps day by day. The easiest thing in the world to give way to is self-will. [00:28:02] But if we are committed to the will of God, we think twice before we exercise self-will. His will is always best.

Someone said aptly that when you're in the will of God, you're safe.

When you're out of the will of God, you're in dire danger. And so what a wonderful thing it was for this tribe of Levi to stand up, as we say today, to stand up and be counted and ready to represent God in this trying situation.

You remember what John the Apostle said at the end of his first letter? Marvelous letter, love, light, all the wonderful things that we find in that letter.

And at the very end of it he says, little children, keep yourselves from idols. The Apostle here at the end of the section that we read said, flee my dearly beloved [00:29:04] from idolatry.

And while it would be actual in both those exhortations, we have to think about its moral sense today as I've already indicated. So a great mass who are unfaithful to God and one tribe ready to stand for God.

Now we come to verse 8, neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

If you turn to the 25th chapter of Numbers, you can read about this incident.

I find it very, very sad, but it has a very deep lesson for us all. The chapters previous to chapter 25 are connected with the wonderful prophecies of Balaam.

[00:30:06] Balaam is made to speak as the mouthpiece of God, reluctantly, but he has to say what God tells him to say.

And he says there's no iniquity in Israel. There's no evil or sin in Israel. They're viewed in their order, in their beauty, in their attractiveness, and he is viewing them and made to speak about them as God saw them as a covenanted people sheltered by blood.

Wonderful thing that they were viewed in that way. And then we find chapter 25, and what a change.

And this is a very important lesson that there can be a vast difference between what we are in position before God and what we are in practice before God.

And yet God would have both to be kept in balance, that what we are in Christ before [00:31:05] him in perfection should govern our lives day by day in practice.

And that's where we need the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. And so we find that the children of Israel were invited, were invited by the people of Moab to come and join them, join them in idolatrous feasts, and fatally they succumbed to it.

We have to be aware of the kind of invitations that we get, it's good sometimes to say no. It would have been better for the children of Israel if they could have said no at that time. And then the wrath of God was seen because the people got into evil living, wickedness, immorality.

It was an affront to the majesty of God and to the purity of his people. [00:32:03] Well, the judgment proceeded.

And then there came brazen, blatant, depraved evil where two important people, one from the nation of Israel, the other from the nation of Midian, committed immorality in full view of the camp, right in the camp of Israel.

What was going to be done?

One man stood forward, Phinehas, a priest, yet with a javelin he exercised God's judgment upon them, summary judgment indeed.

And we find the most wonderful thing said about Phinehas, he acted for God, he was jealous for God.

Here was one man prepared to do something to this awful condition that had crept in amongst the people of God. And he did it, and did it well, and did it thoroughly. [00:33:02] Then God said, this man, Phinehas, he's going to be blessed by me. He's going to have an everlasting priesthood. He and his posterity will be blessed with this privilege of coming before me in response, marvelous blessing. I would like to read the words to you, they're worth reading. Verse 25, I can't quote them correctly, my memory, chapter 25, verse 10.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consume not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace.

[00:34:04] And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel. Well, there's a wonderful commendation from God to this brave man, courageous man, faithful man. And if you like to trace this, you will find it to be true, that it's the posterity of Phinehas that eventually exercises the priesthood for David the king, Zadok.

And go a little further, and go into the book of Ezekiel, and you'll find that it's the sons of Zadok that will exercise the priesthood in the temple that is built in the thousand years reign. Now isn't that wonderful?

One man stood up against the evil that was in that day, one man prepared to be faithful [00:35:06] to God, the rest, they weren't particularly interested. But Phinehas was, he was zealous or jealous for God, and God says, I'll bless that man far into the distance, the distant years, centuries, thousands of years to come. You trace it out, and you'll find what I'm saying is true. What an honor that that man should have a posterity operating in the kingdom when the temple will be built, wonderful temple, and God will be worshipped and responded to, and the sons of Phinehas, the posterity of Phinehas will be exercising that priesthood. You see, God never forgets, and God honors faithfulness, and God has a

long view of things.

Sometimes we cannot see any further than our noses, but God has a long view in front of [00:36:01] him, and God gives his full accord and commendation to all those who are prepared to be faithful to him.

What an honor, an honor to be faithful to God. Oh, if we had time, couldn't we go through the history of the testimony, not so much the apostolic period or the scriptural record, but what we do know, the Christian testimony of men who were prepared to stand for God.

An eminent historian has said that the courage of John Knox, John Calvin, and Martin Luther saved the whole fabric of society from being engulfed in a false form of religion. They stood, and it wasn't easy to stand. They had persecution to endure, but they were faithful, and they had a good knowledge of their God.

They had the utmost confidence in him. Those men, and many, many more, many in this city, many other parts of the world, faithful [00:37:05] men, praise God, too, and faithful women who were encouraged to stand for God, even though the mass might go in a different direction. So how thankful we are for a man like Phinehas. Another thing, if you turn to one of the Psalms, I think it's Psalm 109 or 106, I'm not quite sure. You'll find it says of Phinehas that it was reckoned unto him for righteousness, exactly the same thing that is said of Abram was said of Phinehas. God said, Phinehas, you're a righteous man. In the mass of unrighteousness that existed at that time, he stood out faithful. Now we go on in verse 9, neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted and were destroyed of serpents. In verse 10, neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the [00:38:03] destroyer.

Two things here were challenged. First of all, the leadership of Moses, and secondly, God's appointment of Aaron.

In the first one, chapter 9, we remember the incident in Numbers 21, and the audacity of it. The Bible says they murmured against God and against Moses.

It might have been forgiven if they had murmured against Moses. After all, Moses was only a man, and he might have failed in some point of his leadership, although that's not the point. But to murmur against God is unforgivable.

We may be called upon to pass through very difficult circumstances, unemployment, bereavement, ill health, poverty, many, many things, and they're not pleasant things to pass through. [00:39:04] But it's a good thing when we can go through them with God, not grumble, not complain, not say, well, why has God done this for me, but to go through them with God. But the children of Israel, they weren't prepared to do that. They murmured against God and against the servant Moses, and you know the result. The fiery serpents were sent amongst them, and many of them were bitten, and the venom went through them, and they died.

And then God said to Moses, make a pole, and make a brazen serpent, and fasten it to the pole, put it up before the people, and if they look, they'll live. Well then, that was very wonderful. I don't believe for one moment that there was any particular virtue in the pole or in the brazen serpent. The virtue was in the command of God. He said that if they looked, the people would live, and they did. [00:40:04]

God was merciful to them.

Incidentally, after that, we find the springing well, the figure of the Holy Spirit. We believe this is borne out for us when we come to the antitype in the eighth chapter of Romans, no condemnation to the people of God. Why? Because they are in all the value of the death of Christ and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. Oh, dear friends, how wonderful the death of Christ, how wonderful the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that's why Paul could say there's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Oh, the awfulness of it that they should murmur against God and against his servant. There's no particular indication of any great faithfulness in this matter except to say [00:41:01] that there were those who were willing to do what God told them to do, to look towards this brazen serpent and find deliverance and blessing. If we can just say this very, very simply, that if we take a long gaze at the cross of Christ, we'll find that many of our problems are settled when we realize the wonderful truths that are contained with the death of our Lord Jesus. Not simply meeting the question of our guilt and sin, but the complete removal of the man who caused the sins and bringing into view this new nature, the new nature which is expressed in the power of the Spirit so that we are pleasing to God day by day. But the next challenge was a very, very serious one indeed. I ought to have said in connection with this affront to God and to Moses that Moses never wavered in the belief that he was God's servant. [00:42:01] He never said, oh, well, that's all right. If you're complaining about me, I'll recede into the background. No, Moses had a commission from God and he stood by it and he wasn't going to be pushed aside by any murmuring.

He was true to the commission that God had given to him. Then we come to the next incident, if I remember rightly, is in Numbers 16 and 17. We find it's an affront against God's appointment. God has appointed Aaron to be the high priest.

We find 250 men of renown, princes, leaders, men important in the nation of Israel, sons of Korah, gather themselves together and they're questioning God's appointment. Isn't that a serious thing, a very serious thing, that we should question God's appointment?

Whether it be in a local company or in a more extended sphere throughout the world, if God [00:43:04] appoints brothers and sisters to certain services that they do for him, who are we to question his appointment?

God will support his servants, always does. If God chooses servants, he supports them, gives them his help and his power. This is what we find in this united effort to dislodge Aaron from his position. Oh, what terrible judgment came upon them.

Read the story for yourself in Numbers 16. In chapter 17, we find a remarkable miracle where Aaron's rod that budded and bore fruit, blossomed, was placed into the ark of testimony and was kept there all through the journey until eventually it was removed from the ark when the ark was placed in the temple that Solomon built.

God justified his own choice, always does. [00:44:04] Oh, how he did that in connection with the Lord Jesus, the son of his love. When he opened the heavens upon him, he declared his approval, his delight, his confidence in his well-beloved son. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Six days before he died, we find him on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is my beloved son.

Hear him.

Oh, how God approved of his beloved son here in manhood in a subject way. Oh, dear friends, what a wonderful thing it is to have the approval of God as we are found here in this world.

Not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord approves.

The Lord certainly indicated his approval of Aaron, and Aaron continued his service until it was time for him to die. [00:45:01] He hands over his credentials to Eliezer and the priesthood continues. Praise God, we have a priest who doesn't hand over his credentials to anyone. He lives in the power of an indissoluble life. He has the priesthood intransmissible. He doesn't hand it over to anyone else. Thank God for that kind of priest. Just a few moments and I am finished.

A clear indication that we are all to pay particular heed to those particular incidents in the Old Testament, for they have deep lessons to teach us. We would be very unwise if we said, well, these are only Old Testament stories. Paul says they are particularly for our benefit. So he says, wherefore let him that thinketh, he standeth, take heed lest he fall. Now verse 13 is the one that is bearing on my mind, and I have just one word to say about [00:46:01] it. There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man.

But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear.

The question is, what is the way of escape?

If I am tested, if I am tempted, does God suddenly supply a miraculous escape from whatever temptation or test it may be? Well, I will tell you what I think on the basis of what we have been reading. The way of escape for you, for me, is obedience.

All those people who pleased God, obeyed God. It wasn't easy, it wasn't easy for Phinehas, it wasn't easy for the tribe of Levi, it wasn't [00:47:04] easy for Caleb and Joshua, but they obeyed.

They obeyed God, and God supported them, and God brought them through the difficulties and the trials.

Obedience is the royal road for spiritual growth and spiritual success in a Christian's life. The flesh doesn't like to obey, in fact it cannot obey, the Bible says that, it is impossible that it should please God. The flesh is a terrible thing, a fallen nature, corrupt, incapable of doing good.

We cannot think about obedience connected with our fallen nature. But we do have a new nature, and we do have the indwelling spirit, and because we have, we have the power to obey. But it always comes into the mind, I like this, I like to do that, I like to go there. [00:48:02] That's the desire of the mind, the desire of the heart. I have to ask myself, is that in accord with the will of God? And if it's not, well I have to obey and turn away from it, however difficult it might be, and seek to please God.

Have we an example? Yes, the supreme example.

He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

He obeyed and kept in his father's love, kept his father's commandments. Obedience in its perfection is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now may we be encouraged, for his name's sake.