

Russell Kelfer

There's No Tomorrow!

1314-B

Series: The Mind of Christ

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

There's No Tomorrow!

The problem wasn't conviction;
He'd spiritually worked all through it
He knew exactly what to do
Just never found time to do it.

God had clearly spoken;
And he had clearly heard.
The only question was:
Would he *obey* God's word?

Obedience *was* his goal in life;
But his answer was always the same.
"Tomorrow! I'll obey you, Lord",
(But tomorrow never came.)

Because tomorrow new problems surfaced
And the time was never there,
"Oh, dear God, I *want* to obey"
Would be his fervent prayer.

He intended to do it...tomorrow,
Right up to his dying day,
When he found there's no tomorrow.
Today is the day to obey.

If you are anything like me, you can identify with that poem. Our problems as Christians do not usually center around not knowing what to do. Nor do we suffer primarily from not wanting to do what God calls us to do. We plan to. Tomorrow.

Trouble is, tomorrow never quite comes. And the tyranny of the urgent robs us of our honest desire to be obedient. We want to memorize the word faithfully. We promised ourselves and God just a few weeks ago we would. And we plan to. Tomorrow. We want our prayer life to become what we know it should be. We want to be one of those people who changes the world on his knees. And we've told God that. And we plan to. Tomorrow. We want to get involved

There's No Tomorrow!

in the lives of other people. We want to pour our hearts into hurting hearts and see them changed. And we plan to. Tomorrow. In some cases, we've been planning to for years, waiting for...tomorrow.

With that somewhat grim but honest beginning, we remind you that we are in the midst of a study of the mind of Christ. We are searching for how God looks when He inhabits a man or a woman. What we have found is this: He looks humble. Again and again, he humbles Himself. And in the ultimate act of humility, He (God in man) becomes obedient, even unto death. He surrenders control of His life to the Father's will and, as a *doulos* (a slave), He honors the absolutes of Scripture, follows the principles of Scripture, and humbly submits to the authorities God places over him, because he knows that the powers that be are ordained of God.

We have been looking these past few lessons at what obedience is and what it is we are to obey. We now embark on a look at the who, how, and when to obey. As usual, the answers are incredibly simple. God's answers usually are both simple and impossible. They are simple because they are so easily understood that a child can hear them and understand. In fact, unless we become like little children, we can't really comprehend the utter simplicity of them. But while they are simple, they are also impossible. That means that apart from the indwelling grace of God you can't obey. You don't have the wisdom and you don't have the power. That's why God delights in asking man to do what man can't do, because only then will man humble himself and let God reveal His own nature through us. That is the normal Christian life: utter humility, perfect obedience, quiet rest.

We will not dwell on the who in the equation, but we must mention it, because the problem of obedience that so plagues the Christian community and seems to vary so in its interpretation has a very clear set of limitations. It has a limited warranty, if you will. It is only written to those who have ears to hear. The gospel was penned for two reasons: to convert the lost and to transform the saved. Don't ever confuse the two. It was not written to teach lost man how to live a successful life, even an acceptable life. The gospel teaches that man apart from God doesn't have a life to live. He is a dead man walking around in an earth suit, pretending to be something other than the corpse he is.

So when God says,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and

There's No Tomorrow!

supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:6,7 NKJV)

He isn't making that promise to everyone who is worried and wants peace. It was written to those who have the ear of God by virtue of having come to the Cross and received His free gift of salvation. At salvation, they received His Spirit and at that moment they received the ability to have fellowship with God, have their prayers answered, and have that incredible peace that is promised to all believers in Philippians 4:6,7.

But don't tell your unbelieving friends they need to obey that command. They don't. It won't work. Not unless their prayer is a prayer of repentance to receive Christ into their lives. Without Him, they have nothing to pray about. They have no one to cast their cares upon. This passage was written to believers. And only believers have the power to understand it or obey it.

Submission to authority is a good principle for everyone. But not everyone can claim the promises that accompany it. I Peter 3, for instance, was not written to all women. It was written to women who have been born again, whose husbands might be transformed by seeing Christ alive in their wives. To ask an unbelieving woman to so demonstrate God to her husband is like asking a two-year-old to write a thesis on the theory of relativity. The capacity is not there.

So the "who" in the equation is the Christian. Don't counsel your unbelieving friends to obey Scriptural absolutes that were written to believers. You frustrate them. You discourage them. You imply to them that Christianity doesn't work. It doesn't work without Christ. There is only one absolute for the unbeliever to obey. It is this:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

(John 1:12 NKJV)

If any of the other absolutes in Scripture are to make sense to them, and any of the other promises in Scripture are to apply to them, they must first become Christians. They must receive Christ. Only then, can the Christian life make sense.

Most of us understand that. We do, however, seem to forget

There's No Tomorrow!

when our unbelieving friends are in trouble and we want to give them advice or counsel. We beg them to obey Scripture, and often quote the promises that come from obedience. Be careful. The promises are to those who are “in Christ.” It would be like writing a love letter to your wife promising her a new house when you get home. If someone gives that letter to a bunch of strangers, they can't claim that promise. The letter wasn't written to them. And the house is not being built for them.

The next issue in the arena of obedience is the “when” factor. This is where Satan has a field day. As the poem at the beginning of this lesson indicates, most of us have good intentions. The devil doesn't mind that. He even encourages it. It relieves us of some guilt. It leads us to believe that if we plan to obey, God is impressed and we are spiritual. We get to where we deify the act of conviction as though it were a mark of progress. The only thing conviction does is make us more accountable. It makes no brownie points with God.

God is not interested in conviction, but in transformation. That comes when conviction is acted upon and results in obedience. Some people revel in going to church or a Bible class so they can be moved in their hearts and go home and tell their friends that God spoke to them about this or that. The act of telling someone in fact only elevates self and says “Guess how spiritual I am; God spoke to me today.”

If God has spoken to you about your slothfulness or your faithlessness or your insensitivity, your friends don't need to hear about it. They won't be impressed. They need to see God in you turn your slothfulness to diligence, your faithlessness to faith, your insensitivity to tenderness and availability. Then they will be impressed—not with you, with a God who could do such a miracle with the likes of you. When you brag about your conviction, you are willfully entering into spiritual warfare by creating a new arena for pride, and daring Satan to make a fool of you. He loves that!

The Scripture has a lot to say about when to obey. It is always the same, and it can be summarized with one word: immediately. When it comes to obedience, there's no tomorrow. The Scripture is plain, and human experience confirms it. The longer you wait to obey the known will of God, the less likely you are to do so.

We will be looking this in lesson and the next at five areas where obedience simply must be immediate, or it is not really obedience

There's No Tomorrow!

at all. They are:

- 1- Immediate Obedience and Eternity
- 2- Immediate Obedience and God's Call
- 3- Immediate Obedience and The Obvious
- 4- Immediate Obedience and God's Leading
- 5- Immediate Obedience When Tempted

IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE AND ETERNITY

There is no decision more often postponed, but totally unjustified than the decision of whether or not to give your life to Christ. Like Felix, in Acts 24, you may be waiting for a "convenient" time. It's a good passage to think about it. It reads like this:

And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."
(Acts 24:24, 25 NKJV)

"When I have a convenient season" is Satan's trademark. It is his timetable for spiritual decision-making. "When it's convenient; maybe tomorrow." But, Beloved, there's no tomorrow. Today is the acceptable time. Tomorrow may never come. And if you have waited for perhaps years of tomorrows to come and go waiting for that "convenient" time, by now you should know that it will never be "convenient."

If a doctor calls you and tells you that you have a potentially fatal disease, but you can be cured if you take the medicine now. You wouldn't say to him, "Doc, that's wonderful. But I have a meeting to go to tonight, a ball game Thursday, and some housework to do the rest of the month. I'll call you back at a "convenient time." How ridiculous. If you knew you were dying, but could be saved, you would race to that doctor's office as fast as your car could take you there.

Beloved, if you have never given your heart to Christ, you are dying. You have the most consistently terminal disease known to man, the disease of sin. But you can be cured today. Not tomorrow. Tomorrow may never come. From a practical standpoint, there's no tomorrow. Today is the day of your salvation. The writer of Hebrews made it so clear:

There's No Tomorrow!

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness,

Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.

Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.

So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. (Hebrews 3:7-15 NKJV)

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it (Hebrews 4:2 NKJV)

Today. Before the enemy has a chance to divert your attention again. Today. Before the "the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."¹ Today, "lest you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Today. Because there is no guarantee that there will be a tomorrow. Today is the day. Today. Because every day you wait is a day wasted. Do you want to come to the end of your life and say, "Why did I wait so long?" This poem tells it like it is:

LATE IN LIFE

How often, late in life has man
Gazed backward through the years,
And viewed the life he's wasted
Through dark and bitter tears.

How often man has viewed his soul
(And every chance he's had)
And thought, "If I'd but trusted Christ
When I was still a lad.

All those years I've wasted
I've lived them bound in sin,
And every time the Lord would knock
I failed to let Him in.

¹ Mark 4:19 NKJV

There's No Tomorrow!

And now as sunset's fleeting glow
Has rimmed the skies with strife,
I've come to trust in Jesus
And find eternal life.

Such joy I've found; such peace I know
But, oh, the souls unsaved,
Because of all the years between
I lived as Satan's slave.

Young people, hearken Jesus' call
While you're a youth instead,
That you might reap the harvest
In the years that lie ahead."

Oh, the peril of a wasted life. And one day you will have postponed responding until you cannot even hear God's gentle call. Saying "no" to Christ is like listening to the loud drumming of the enemy's beat. It deadens the senses; weakens the hearing. The next time He calls, there is a veil of rejection between you and Him. And each time you "postpone" that decision, you are less likely even to hear Him when He calls. Eventually, as well, God is forced to acknowledge the wall that you have built between the two of you. The words of Proverbs 1 become a reality. The scenario is described there like this: turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,

Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke,

I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes,

When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

"Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me

Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

They would have [heeded] none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke.

Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be

There's No Tomorrow!

filled to the full with their own fancies.

(Proverbs 1:23-31 NKJV)

Apparently there comes a time in a man or woman's life when he or she has heard the gospel for the last time with a chance to respond. There comes a time when God's infinite patience reaches the conclusion that there is a heart that has said "no" long enough that it will never be opened to truth. No one knows when that last time is. No one but God. One thing is sure. There's no tomorrow. Today is the day of salvation.

If you have postponed giving your heart and life to Christ, today is the day of your salvation. Maybe the last day. "They did not choose the fear of the Lord" was the description. God had sent testing into their lives, but even in their distress they would not listen. You may say "no" one more time, and God's loving heart may know that never again will you be open to truth. When to obey God's call to salvation? Today, beloved. There's no tomorrow.

IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE AND GOD'S CALL

The second arena in which obedience requires immediate response is the battlefield of God's calling. Satan has two ploys he uses successfully in the Christian's life. One is to get a man or woman to answer a call *prematurely* in the flesh. You think God might be calling you to a special task or ministry, and instead of waiting patiently on God to verify the call and reveal His timing, you take the call as a cue from God to move out on your own. The result is disaster, and your faith is shaken. Until God makes it clear, wait.

Ah, but once He does, do not tarry. And if He does, do not waiver. Isaiah chronicles the response God wants to hear:

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8 NKJV)

Not later, send me now, LORD, if you choose. Remember Jesus' teaching in Luke, chapter nine? He had just fed the five thousand and given His disciples a preview of His coming death and resurrection. The urgency of the hour was apparent. The awesomeness of His power was evident. The mount of transfiguration followed, only to be followed by the Master's precious encounter with a little child. What power! What love! What urgency! Then we read those fateful words in Luke:

There's No Tomorrow!

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.

Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."

But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

(Luke 9:57-62 NKJV)

These were not bad excuses. But they were excuses. Jesus, God in man on planet earth, was not preoccupied with any of the world's reasons for postponing obedience. The Master had no place to lay His precious head. He had no earthly entanglements. His home was in heaven and the only thing that occupied His heart on earth was what the Father had in mind to bring in the kingdom. Nothing else could preempt His *immediate* response. Nothing. Oh, that the same could be said of us.

We have such good intentions. We have such distinct plans. But things get in the way. *Good* things. The seemingly "necessary" duties of the household. The seemingly urgent tasks no one else can do. The seemingly vital relationships that we hate to give up. Jesus said, "Don't look back." If God has called you to a task, do it. There will always be a reason to wait. There will always be a voice within beckoning you, "Maybe tomorrow." That's the "voice of the stranger." Answer him, "There's no tomorrow." God has called, nothing else matters. Maybe God has called you to teach, or to minister in a mission venture, or to work with children and you plan to...tomorrow. Tomorrow is now. Do it.

IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE AND THE OBVIOUS

There is, however, a third area of obedience that is even more critical, more often encountered, and less understood. It is obedience to the obvious. We will not have time to finish looking at what that means in this study, but we can begin.

By "the obvious" we mean those things that Scripture teaches are the *normal* areas in which God does not offer alternatives. The

There's No Tomorrow!

absolutes of Scripture are one example. The issue of friendships is a good illustration. The Bible forbids close friendships or alliances with unbelievers. You plan to give up that relationship...some day. Maybe tomorrow. Oh, really? Then you probably never will. Not until or unless God sends you some lightning bolt from heaven to get your attention. His Word is all you need. If it's wrong today it will really be wrong tomorrow. Don't buy the devil's lie. There's no tomorrow. Go home, pick up the phone and call it off. Now. Not tomorrow.

There is the issue of unconfessed sin. You plan to deal with it. Tomorrow. But by tomorrow, it will have gained inroads into your heart and the sensitivity to that sin will be slightly dulled. Your conscience will have been "seared with a hot iron". You plan to get it right with God. Tomorrow. But tomorrow, it will seem okay. That message you heard will be forgotten. That Scripture you read will be farther removed. That conviction you felt will be gone. You can go on and sin some more. One day, you'll get right. Remember, the easiest time would have been yesterday. The hardest time will be tomorrow. Therefore, the best time is today. Get down on your knees before you so much as pick up the newspaper, eat a meal or even get immersed in some "spiritual" activity, and get things right with God. Don't wait for tomorrow. There's no tomorrow. It's a mirage. It's a lie. It's a detour that leads you down the road to disaster and destruction.

Remember the parable of the sower? There were four scenarios: 1) In the first one, the seed fell by the wayside, it was trodden underfoot, and the birds came and snatched it up. 2) Some seed fell on the rocks, had no roots, never bore fruit. 3) Some fell among thorns, and the thorns choked the seed, so it never grew. 4) Some, however, fell on good ground. It sprang up and multiplied and bore fruit a hundredfold. The disciples were confused (as usual). They didn't know what He meant. So He told them in Luke 8:10-18:

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." (Luke 8:11,12 NKJV)

Then He talked about the seed that fell on the rock.

"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root..."

(Luke 8:13 NKJV)

There's No Tomorrow!

Finally, He explains the seed that falls among the thorns:

Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

(Luke 8:14 NKJV)

Do you see what all three have in common? They lack *immediate obedience*. The seed is God's Word. The seed-snatcher is Satan. His job on planet earth is to take the Word that has been received into your heart, even through this study, and see that it does not bear fruit. He lives to keep you from obeying. His greatest tool is procrastination. He does not mind your good intentions, so long as they include that dreadful phrase, "tomorrow".

I have no idea what God might be saying to you through this study. I know what He is saying to me. The issue is: "What will we do about it?" Do we plan to obey...tomorrow? Wouldn't it be more honest to say to God, "I don't want to do Your will. If I did, I would do it now"? We'd rather play games with God, though. We'd rather tell God and others how convicted we are, and how we plan to obey...tomorrow. That salves our conscience, fills us with false hope based on presumption, and lets the devil have a field day.

Whatever God is saying to you, whatever area of obedience beckons, the issue is not whether or not you plan to obey. The issue is: "Will you obey today?"

WILL YOU OBEY TODAY?

If it really is God calling,
If I've heard it in His Word,
If the issue clearly stated is:
Will I obey My Lord?

Then whisper not, "Tomorrow".
Here's what you have to say,
"Dear Lord, I will obey you,
And I'll obey...today."

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer