

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Obedience - Seed the Clouds

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What a wonderful time of the year. I love it when it becomes hot outside. Anybody excited about the warm weather? You know for a lot of us Memorial Day rolls around and it's an opportunity for us, the pools are opened up and we can hang out a little bit but also it's a time for us to remember those that served us and have gone on and so we are thankful for those that have lost their lives in service to our country.

As we get into our time today one of the other things about this time of the year is that for any sports fan, and I know that everyone in here might not be sports fans, but for any sports fan in here, May and June presents and awesome opportunity for us. We have baseball kind of in full swing, basketball finals are kind of yearning and coming around but we also have hockey. Any hockey fans in here? Any Nat's, yeah, Cap's fans, yeah, I said Nat's right? But one of the things about this is that any athlete has a ritual, has things that they do, they want to prepare themselves for their game. You see, baseball players they do what they do before they get up to bat, hockey players may do what they do back in the locker room, basketball players they have a routine at the free throw line. And a lot of this is done to kind of hone down and kind of control some of their anxiety and some of the worry about their game. And if we're looking at ourselves a lot of us maybe have things that we do to prepare as well for our days. Everybody prepares for work on Sunday night, you start getting that feel like, oh work is coming up. Anybody been there before? Or maybe it's that conversation you have to have with someone that may not be quite as pleasant, maybe a spouse or roommate or friend. We all have things that we do to prepare ourselves. There was a study done a couple of years and the New York Times posted it and it was about the amount of people that worry or have concerns on a weekly basis. And one of the things that the study found is that not only on a weekly basis but on a daily basis every two out of five people worry or are concerned about something. I would say it's probably a little more than two in every five, right. But the reality is one of the things that the study started to pull out were the things that people were worried about and the things that people were anxious and stressed out about, vocation, money, inter-personal relationships. And as we think about our own lives maybe we develop ways of approaching these issues, maybe there are things that we do to prepare. For a lot of us it may be working harder, I just need to work harder, I just need to prepare harder, I just need the spreadsheet or this database the kind of figure my life out. For others you may sit in the place where you just say hey, I'm just going to wait on God. Guys ever heard that before? I'm just going to wait on God. But the reality is often times we may say that we're waiting on God when God may just be waiting on us. But he's ready for us to step up he's ready for us to co-labor with him.

Last week Pastor Mark started the series of messages call Seed the Clouds. As he talked about Seed the Clouds he really talked about our role in a way that we can kind of not manipulate but get involved in that process of what God may want to do in our lives. He talked about being positive. He talked about being humble. He talked about being generous. For many of us that starts that process of raining down God's blessing or God's best for our life. And if we look at our lives, some of us may be in those dry places right now, where we're worried about something,

where we're anxious about something. We're trying to figure it out, God, what do I do? How do I navigate this situation?

You know one of the ways that we seed our clouds as it relates to our own walk and our own spiritual lives and where we are we find it in the Book of Joshua. Joshua 3 tells the story of Joshua as he leads the children of Israel into the Promised Land. Remember Joshua was one of the two spies that came back with a positive report of the 12. He was with Moses. He walked with Moses. He saw everything that Moses did not only the good stuff but the bad stuff. And so Joshua step into this place of obedience to God, God elevated Joshua. As we find it in Joshua 3 the word of the Lord says...

*"<sup>1</sup> Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. <sup>2</sup> After three days the officers went throughout the camp, <sup>3</sup> giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it."*

You know one of the things that's going on there is that Joshua's camped out, he has all the priests, he has all these individuals, over 2 million people some estimates say camped out at them at the base of the Jordan ready to cross over. You know one of the things that Joshua, that we see in Joshua's life as well, is that not only is he a leader but God says time and time again; in the same way I was with Moses I will be with you. I'm sure Joshua and all the people here were probably a little worried they were probably a little anxious. It was probably a bigger ratio than 2 to 5. When they looked at the Jordan they saw the Jordan swell, it was swelling over it's banks and they were to cross over into the Promised Land.

For many of us we may be at the the banks of the Jordan right now. We look over into our lives, we look at the barriers in the things that may hinder us from reaching over where we think that God wants us to be. It could be those relationships. It could be something that we did a long time ago that still kind of hampering right now, you know those things that we do in our life and we can really forgive ourselves. That mistake that we made, that comment that we made, or that one thing that we did. Maybe it's even a good place. Maybe we've become a little over-confident with where we are. Maybe our identity is in our job or who we work for or our salaries. Whatever it may be for us today notice what happens in this passage, that what God says to them, he says *"when you see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God and the Levitical priests carrying it you are to move out from your positions and follow it."* God was doing a new thing in their life.

Verse four goes on to say that he's going to do a new thing. *<sup>4</sup> Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before."* What God calls him to do was to be in acts obedience toward him to follow the Ark of the Covenant. And some Scholars will say that they step back and they were able to see the Ark of the Covenant because it was 3000 feet away. Sometimes when we look at our individual lives, sometimes we're too close to the situation to really see what God is doing.

When I was growing up, we had these floor model televisions. Anybody ever seen a floor model television before? The interesting thing about these floor model televisions is that the television itself looked like it was about 50 inches but the screen was about 13 inches. And I used to sit so

close to this television and my parents would always, you know, tell me these things; oh, you're going to go blind, you can't see, all these other things going to happen when you sit so close, but it was because they wanted to see the TV too, right. But the reality is when you're this close to the television you can't see the whole picture. It was when I stepped back and I slid back a little bit that I was able to see everything that was going on on Tom and Jerry. That was one of my favorite things. And so often in our lives, we just need to take a step back and to see all the wonderful things that God is doing in our individual lives, all the things that he's doing in our collective lives.

He goes on him verse four, he talks about being able to step back because God is taking them to a place they've never been before. But it says; *"But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits, which is about 3000 ft, between you and the ark; do not go near it."*

And verse 5, this is where we pick up; <sup>5</sup> *Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."*

Consecrate yourselves, what this means is to set yourself apart, not only just a set yourself apart, but the set yourself apart for the work of the Lord, to pour out of yourself to things that shouldn't be in there and to receive the blessing of God, what God wants to do in your life. You know, the reality is I have this Gatorade bottle here, right and many of us try to be conscious of our environment so I probably shouldn't be using this anyway, right but as I'm using this Gatorade bottle, I'll use it a couple times. I'll drink Gatorade out and the reality is sometimes I'll fill it up with water and I get the Gatorade powder and put it in and shake it up and then you got Gatorade again. But if I never put the Gatorade powder back in and shook it up, I would just have lukewarm water. For many of us we pour the things out and we get things out but we need to put the things of God back in us 'cause the reality is when we're squeeze or when we're poured out what's going to come out is what we put inside of us. And so, those moments when we're stressed and we're pressed up against the wall in personal relationships, work, other stressors with children, when we're squeezed and more important what's going to come out is the things that we put in. That we can be slow to speak, that we can be forgiving, that we can extend the grace that God has extended to us, that we recognize all the good works in advance that God has prepared for each one of us to do. This idea of consecration is stepping back, is setting yourself apart, but it comes from a life of obedience. This idea of consecration isn't just I'm just setting myself apart. I'm doing it because it's an act of obedience and love to God. He says if you love me, you will obey what I command. We're able to understand the things of the Lord by reading his word, by being in communion with others. That's why our life groups and our small group so important for us to be in community with other people, to work out our faith with fear and trembling with other people not just by ourselves.

You know, there's some barriers to obedience. Oh my goodness. If we were to think about our lives and my beautiful wife is here and we have 3 kids y'all so, you know, we know a little something about obedience particularly dealing with our kids. But if you were to think about some things that kids do and say; one of our daughters she's very quick to blame her little sister no matter what's happening. And my wife and I the other day we were driving and the little sister was with Grandma and she still blamed her little sister. Oh, yes, she did that, like she's not even here with us. For many of us it could be when I get there, when I get this job or when I get this

new house or someone did this or somebody did this or I need to be someplace else, like we have barriers for our obedience, things that may hinder us.

You know part of my story is that my wife and I met in college at the University of Virginia. We were both on the track and field team. And so for those that have seen Love & Basketball we're like Love & Track. But one of my primary events were the 110-meter hurdles and anyone who's ever seen a hurdle is 42 inches high, which is pretty high and the goal with the hurdle is to run as fast as you can at the hurdle and get over it and get on the other side without knocking to hurdle over. It's a huge barrier. It's a huge hindrance. But the goal of the hurdle is not just the jump the hurdle but you're literally running to hurdle. It's an extended stride. You don't slow down you don't break your form because you're racing other people in your racing to the finish line. For a lot of the issues and problems that we deal with our life they're like these hurdles, you know, the goal is not to just stay back in and wait for the hurdle to come to us, but we're that attack those issues. We're to attack those problems and the reality scripture reminds us that is not by might not by power but it's by God's spirit that were able to do that. And so when we talk about consecration, we're emptying of ourselves and make ourselves available so God can pour in and use us for those good works in advance that he prepared for us.

Friends, consecration is an act of obedience. You know, but isn't it great that we have a God that loves us? You know when we look back to the to the story in Genesis where Adam and Eve fell short, they sinned in the garden, sin entered in to the world, but we have a God that knew that that would happen and he knew that everything that we would do, the sin that we had would separate us from him. And so his whole plan was to send his Son Jesus to die on the cross for each one of us that he pursued each one of us no matter your mistakes, no matter your failure, no matter the things that you've done in your life that he pursued each one of us. That he loves us intently and that he created a plan for us and by Jesus dying on the cross for our sins that we have this this thing called salvation. You know, theologians like to call it soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation. And what that means is that as you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead that you're justified, that you're saved at that moment. But then this other process called sanctification comes in where the Holy Spirit comes into your life and starts to mold and shape and move and make you into the image of Christ daily. That's the daily process that he's doing. So as we consecrate ourselves what we're saying is God I invite your spirit to dwell within me and to mold me and shape me into the image of Christ. So that not only can I be a disciple, but I can be a disciple maker that in every sphere of influence and I'm in at my job, at my home that I'm drawing people to God. And in this text that's exactly what God was doing for the people of Israel, the children of Israel.

Then he goes on to say in versus 6 & 7 that <sup>6</sup>Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead." And verse 7 "And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes all of Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses." That not only is God exalting Joshua, but but he's showing off a little bit, God is saying and I am here I am the God that was with Moses. I am that God. Same God today lives in our lives or if he doesn't he's willing and ready we're waiting on God, but God is waiting on us. That's the way that we seed the clouds. That God's best can rain down on us when we consecrate ourselves in obedience to him, when we lay ourselves down before him.

You know, the wonderful thing about consecration for each one of us is that there are a number of things that we can do, a couple of steps that we could do the kind of navigate that a little, bit steps to obedience. The first it's just to be aware that often times as we navigate life we're not really aware of the things that cause us to fall into areas of disobedience. I love the acronym PIES; P is for physical, I is for intellectual, E is for emotional and S is for Spiritual. One way that we can be aware is by really looking at ourselves in the eyes of PIES, right physically. How are we doing physically? All right, you know physical that sometimes that causes little problems with areas of obedience in our life. You know, anybody been hungry before yeah, hungry can make you do some crazy stuff, right? Yeah, anybody been sleepy and tired that can make you do some crazy stuff to what about both of them together.

My wife and I we spent 10 years in Boston as a part of a church plant and I was working in higher ed and doing, you know church at the same, being bi-vocational, doing like Paul, tent making and all that stuff. But one Friday we took our kids to this group called Awanas, so they went teaching scriptures and all these awesome things and you know, we were already hungry and tired. It was one of those cold, Boston days. It was kind of rainy outside and you know, we really probably didn't want to go but we knew we needed to take our kids to Awanas 'cause we didn't want them engulfed with the culture. You know, how we do right? But we took them to Awanas and on the way home, the kids were whining, they were very whinny. {Whines like kids} You know just all the different things and then my wife she was kind of getting after them a little bit like {whined} She was going back and forth with them and then me and my Infinite wisdom yelled out, my wife was like y'all just need a nap and then myself, I kinda yelled out 'everybody needs a nap'. And I kind of gave her that look like do you need a nap too? And, she's laughing now but she wasn't laughing then, y'all. But it was a great reminder and we just got to look at each other and we did laugh a little later because I was hungry and I was tired all of us in the whole car was hungry and tired it was like the perfect storm in the Mason home. But it pointed out something, those areas of hunger and tiredness when we're not aware of ourselves physically we can fall into areas of disobedience very quickly, very, very quickly.

You know, the I intellectually. I worked as a dean of students of a college and part of my role was to be the chief disciplinarian for the whole campus and had a number of students that would fall into issues with intellectual integrity or academic integrity because I got a little tired, they got a little overwhelmed. And for some people it's in their work to where things are plagiarized all the time and part of that reason is that you're not quite aware of where you are intellectually. You may be a little tapped out for those that are in grad school or college; you know how it feels when you write a whole bunch of papers, you're tired of writing papers. Right? And one of the common things is double submission or dual submission where student is kind of far longer than major they'll take the same paper and scratch the teacher's name off and they write a new teacher's name on it and submit that paper. And you know I run into those issues a lot in the Collegiate level where students will do that where they are not aware of themselves intellectually, they get tapped out. And if we're not careful we can fall into some of those same things that may not be the same thing as writing a paper or in our work but intellectually we may not be engaging in the way that we should, we may not be hearing in the way that we should and we may all together just say I'm not even going to read, I don't want to read anymore, so I'm not even going to get in the God word. Family we need to be aware of where we are intellectually.

Also emotionally. Emotions run rampant, right. When we're lonely we can easily fall into places of doing things that we probably shouldn't do, right. You know we get that call, summer times rolling around, right, you get that call. Let's watch Hulu together, or watch Sling together or watch Netflix. You know that Netflix turns into like Netflix and chill when you're emotionally down, right. A couple of y'all call Netflix and Chill, right? That happens at times, you know one of my favorite songs growing up, Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, Summertime. "School is out and I've been on the court yet. Hustle to the mall to get me a short set. Yeah. I got on sneaks but I need a new pair cuz basketball time in the summer gets what girls there, right?" Summertime rolls around for us emotionally we have to be aware. This is a time for us to put our guards up family, to guard our eyes, to guard our hearts. We can easily fall into things that don't bring God glory at all. We have to be aware physically and intellectually emotionally, but also spiritually.

If you've ever been disconnected from God, you've ever had any sin in your life where you just felt lonely and apart from God. You know, the lie that the enemy would love to spew out and love to share is that you've done this one time so you need to do this again and this needs to become your lifestyle. But the reality is when we are aware that we know that that's a mistake that we made or something that we've done that's not who we are because God created each one of us in His image. He created us not only in His image, but he created us for good works. Not only did he create us for good works, but he called us to renew our minds and to offer our bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to him. Friends our first step to obedience is to be aware?

You know, secondly we have to be intentional as well. My wife is great at making cake. She makes this cake color red velvet cake. Oh my goodness. I love her red velvet cakes, but one of the things as she makes these cakes, she's very intentional when she makes these cakes. She has the family recipes that she won't show anybody else not even me, but she makes these cakes and she puts in these ingredients and the cake comes out wonderful. If she wasn't intentional about putting the vanilla or putting the sugar or putting the cream cheese. I watch you so I know what you do. If she wasn't intentional, if she wasn't intentional about these things the cake wouldn't turn out the way that it should be. In that same way if we're not intentional about reading God's word, being in fellowship with one another, praying, confessing our sins then how are we going to grow spiritually? Family, we have to be intentional, this keeps us in line with the things of God. This helps us to be obedient.

I love how the Apostle Paul rolls out in 1st Corinthians 9. He talks about this boxer and this athlete kind of going back and forth and he and he essentially says that <sup>26</sup>*"Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly;"* That you run with purpose that you run with form. There's no wasted motion. He talks about a boxer; *"I do not fight like a boxer just beating the air."* That everything is intentional; every step that we make should have purpose.

You know, the final step for us is to be consistent. To live lifestyles of obedience, that we have to be consistent Hebrews chapter 11 says <sup>6</sup>*"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* Earnestly seeking as we consistently pursue God. This prevents us from falling into lives of disobedience. Family consecration is loving God. Consecration is setting ourselves apart. Consecration is an act of obedience and love for us to be consistent. You know,

what it means is that not only are we walking with God daily, but we're doing it for the right reasons. You know often times we can do the right things for the wrong reasons if we see God as this great genie who's going to bless us and help our Caps win and our Nat's win and are Celtics win. Y'all called it I still love Boston? If we think that that's who the God that we serve is then we can be a little manipulative in the way that we interact with God. Like we'll do all the right things when Caps are playing we'll {tick, tick tick} we're right in line praying, getting in the word, hallelujah, doing everything that we need to do. But the reality is we don't, we're not obedient to God because we're wanting something back from him because God has already given us the greatest gift that we could ever ask for, he's given us life and life eternally through the person of Jesus Christ. And so for us we're aligning ourselves with God, we're saying that we're going to be obedient to him, that we're going to love him with all of my heart, our mind, our soul, our strength because he first loved us.

Family when we're aware, when we're intentional, when we're consistent that allows us to live lives of obedience. But even more than just living lives of obedience a life of consecration means that were emptying of ourselves and we're saying God we want you to seed the clouds right now right here for us because we're in this dry season and we're making ourselves available to be used for you God.

National Community Church, I'm not sure where you are today. I'm not sure where God may want to take us as a church, but know that God is going to do miraculous things for us in the same way he calls the children of Israel to prepare themselves, to consecrate themselves because he wanted to lead them into the Promised Land God is doing a work right here in our church. In each one of our individual lives God is doing something. And what he demands of us is that we consecrate ourselves, but then also that we're concentrating ourselves corporately as well because each one of us is given certain gifts and talents and abilities to use not as individuals but as a collective group of people. The word for it is a group of called out people 'ekklesia' the church, that's who we are.

National Community Church, I invite you to stand to your feet. And as we continue in our time of worship as we close out this service, I invite you just to search your own heart. You know, what are those things that you need to remove from your life right now; those things that are causing you to follow fall into areas of disobedience; those things that God just one wants to take away so he can pour his life and spirit into you.

God, we're so grateful for your love for us. And Lord, as we sing this next song God, the prayers that Lord, we see you as one that loves us, that cares for us, that pursued us and Lord, our desire is to consecrate ourselves, to lay ourselves before you. Prayers Lord, that you get glory from each one of our lives. Lord, we thank you, and we praise you for this time, in Jesus name. Amen.