

## Title: "Obedience and the Gospel"

Chris Ryan

Acts 5:29

4/16/2023

**Service Readings:** Acts 5:29-42, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31

*What does obedience to God mean and has that changed from the time of Moses to the time of the apostles? And has it changed to our time, also?*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Have you ever had a period of time where everything that could go wrong *does* go wrong? Where regardless of what decision you make, it somehow becomes the absolute *worst* decision and causes the situation itself to become even worse? In these times, does it sometimes seem like the *best* decision is to make *no* decision at all? Where the best thing you can do is close your eyes, close your ears, close your mouth, and hide under the covers for a week, or month, until *whatever is wrong with the world, rights itself*?

This *had* to be what the members of the Sanhedrin were thinking. They were like a Supreme Court of sorts for ancient Israel and the past several months were anything but normal. Indeed, maybe even the last three or so years! For during that time they were confronted with this problem called Jesus that just didn't seem to go away. At first he barely registered as a problem. Sure his teachings were contrary to what they believed, but he had a very small following and they had bigger problems that demanded their attention. But that little problem seemed to grow and take on a life of its own. He wasn't just performing signs and miracles, he was offering them as proof that he was sent by God, even that he *was* God, and that he had the power and authority to *forgive sins*! With every healing he performed, every lesson he taught, the crowds just seemed to get bigger. The demons he expelled from people hated him, but the people loved him. And the Sanhedrin? They just wanted him gone.

Eventually they would achieve that. They would hand him over to Rome and he would be executed. Problem solved. Except it wasn't. For no sooner had they buried their problem in a tomb, their problem reappeared, and in even more glory than before! And causing even more problems than when he was alive! For no longer was it *just him* but now all his followers were full of confidence and proclaiming the same message that Jesus did when he was alive! And it wasn't just preaching but also miracles! They were performing miracles in *his* name! This problem would just simply not go away! In fact, it was growing!

So they tried to contain it. They gathered up these Jesus followers and tossed them in prison. But they escaped! And instead of leaving town they stayed and continued to preach! Without fear! This made no sense to the Sanhedrin. For until now they thought they had control of the situation. For

until now they had always been able to *have* control of the situation. But ever since the death of this Jesus, things have gotten worse, not better. So what are they to do? What is their next step?

Their next step is to do the only thing they know how to do: they flex their power and bring the disciples in before them. Confinement didn't solve the problem and so they will need to utilize a bigger hammer.

Except. The disciples. The thought begins to creep into their minds. What if. What if they don't have a big enough hammer? What if.... Physical pain... death.... is not a big enough hammer? Just that *thought* defies logic. How can *death* not solve a problem like this? It seems to have only made things worse! The crucifixion of Jesus should have put an end to this problem, but it seems that it only made it worse. And so what to do with these followers? What if... what if..... the death of them will just *add* to this fire that seems to be growing out of control??

One step at a time. Bring in these disciples and hear what they have to say. How did they escape prison? Why was incarceration not a deterrent? What can these leaders do to impress upon them the importance of complying with the Jewish laws? This seems like a logical next step and so that is exactly what they do. They bring them in. They confront them. And how do the disciples respond?

<sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Now what? It's clear that these followers are not afraid of the Sanhedrin. How that can be possible is anyone's guess, but it is crystal clear. For these simple people, these fishermen, these followers to stand there and accuse the Jewish leaders of killing Jesus!

The fire is clearly burning and it is spreading out of control. But what do they mean, "We must obey God rather than men?" For *they* were obeying God. How could two different groups be doing the same thing but still be in opposition?

For these leaders, obedience to God meant the Ten Commandments. It meant submitting to God's law that was given to Moses. But to the disciples, obedience to God meant something else. *Entirely* something else. And that just didn't compute. If obedience to God didn't mean adhering to these laws, what did it mean?

To the disciples, obedience meant something completely different. Just as Jesus had turned so many things upside down, he also did the same for this topic. To the Jewish leaders obedience was a *condition* to achievement. It was the means to a some end, a means to some goal. Obey and then achieve favor with God. Disobey, and don't. But the disciples were framing it much differently. They didn't see it as a demand. They didn't see it as an end to this glorious goal. Instead, they saw obedience as a *response*. They saw it as a reaction to something. And that something was Jesus! See? Once again it all came back to this Jesus! They couldn't escape this person whom they handed over to Rome to kill. What was it about this Jesus that they just couldn't escape?

No longer would obedience be a *condition* to achievement, rather it would be *evidence* of achievement, or more specifically, evidence of salvation. Obedience, you see, would be used not to *achieve* but to *express*. This is what the disciples were doing when they made that statement that they must obey God rather than man. It wasn't that they must follow the rules that God laid before them so that they could achieve salvation. Rather, they acknowledged that they had already achieved salvation by the work of Jesus and so their obedience was an expression of that gift.

Stop for a moment and consider the implications that this fuller view of obedience had on their lives. We see their response to suffering as just one example, for how else could they, or anyone, otherwise be found rejoicing because of suffering? You see, those who attached themselves to the teachings of the Old Testament didn't recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of the very laws they were following. But the disciples did. And so, to them, obedience became a responsive action. They knew, and we also know, that God has already acted on our behalf. Jesus was already obedient to the Father. And through that obedience we have been redeemed. So, our response to *his* obedience... is our own obedience. Our salvation does not depend on our obedience but on his. This makes no sense to the Sanhedrin and it makes no sense to the world, but it made perfect sense to the disciples. And it makes perfect sense to us. Our salvation depends on him, and our salvation has already been won, and so we are free to obey God not out of fear but out of love.

But what does obedience look like in this world, today? For the disciples, the motivation for their disobedience was not hate, or defiance, but a desire to change the hearts and minds of those who would judge them. In a moment their words would have turned from Law to Gospel if the leaders would have repented. The obedience that they spoke of was an obedience to go and make disciples of all nations. And it was this command that they were following. It was this command that they were obeying. And the moment that a civil authority stood in their way, they challenged it, but at the same time extended their invitation to those who stood against them. And the moment that they were free, the moment the obstacle had been removed, they went back to obeying God by preaching the message of Jesus to the world. Why? because they were responding to the work of Jesus by preaching to others his very work.

And so as we go out into the world today we are called to do the same. We preach the good news of our salvation, we preach Jesus. We don't back down from that call. We obey it, not out of necessity but out of a response. And when we are challenged, we preach to those who challenge us, not out of defiance or hate, but out of love, for our desire is for the Holy Spirit to convict and regenerate them. We must obey God rather than men so that men can hear the gospel of Jesus and be converted. This is why we obey. This is how we obey.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, through your obedience you have redeemed us and brought us back into communion with the Father. May we always remember that it is your obedience, alone that has done that, and may we respond through our own obedience to him.