

Message Date: 08-09-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 3: Things get real!

Message Title: Week 4, A question of Obedience

✠ What first comes to mind when you think of the word... obedience?

- *If you are a parent... that's what I want my kids to do! Be obedient! Hey, GOD says this! Ephesians 6: "Children, obey your parents, for this is right"*
- *If you are the kid, you might have a different take on that whole dynamic!*
- *What if YOU are person being told to obey, Could be by your employer, government, traffic signals, department of public health?*
- *NOW, this isn't always the case, of course, but most of us instinctively chafe at being told what to do, ESPECIALLY if we don't particularly agree with or enjoy what we are being told to obey. We don't like the idea of having to be obedient to someone, even though this is a reality of life for almost all of us.*
- *No accident that the traditional vow of the wife obeying her husband is becoming very rare*
- *But- and I'm talking to us as followers of Christ now- what about when the CALL TO OBEY... is from GOD. How do we feel, what do we think, about the need to be obedient to God?*
- *This is of course very Biblical. John 14:15, Jesus said "If you love me, you will obey my commandments". It's been said the only real expression of love and trust of God is obedience to God, and you can make a strong Biblical case...*
- *But this brings up some really important questions. When we think of being obedient to God, what comes to mind?*
 - *For many, especially if more legalistic background, biggest thing of obedience to God is NOT SINNING. The 'Thou shalt nots'.. we don't sin, because, well, that's disobedient*
 - *Thinking seems to be that if we can pound into people's heads what is wrong and disobedient to God, that this will someone yield goodness and obedience. Problem is that you can go to pretty much any family, church, or dynamic where this is the operating philosophy, and ask "HOWS that workin out for ya!"... Honest answer is... not well!*
 - *I mean, imagine a child saying "wait... you mean that me ignoring you is disobedience? I had no idea! Here, let me go clean my room"*
 - *Or an alcoholic or drug addict saying... "oh, you mean this thing that is destroying my life and I can't shake... this.. this is disobedience to God? Well, in that case, I'm all done! Thanks!" NO, of course not!*
- *Not only does that philosophy not work, it misses the bigger NT point that the chief purpose of obedience to God is NOT just avoiding what is bad, but following God into what is GOOD. Being obedient to God as he grows us, shapes us, works through us to be a blessing to ourselves and those around us!*
- *BUT EVEN HERE, we can run into trouble when we think the reason for following God in a positive sense is purely a function of obedience.*
- *Several years ago I had a Christian friend who saw virtually everything in the Christian life through the lens of 'just obedience'*
 - *Why give financially to the church... OBEDIENCE*
 - *Why faithfully participate in church... OBEDIENCE*
 - *Why serve in the church... OBEDIENCE*

○ **Why share your faith... OBEDIENCE**

- **Scripture says we are supposed to do all of these things, so we must obey? What not clear about this?**
- **Problem isn't that it's not CLEAR... God, through scripture, DOES command us to be generous, to be faithful/ integral members of his body, the church, and to share our faith. Problem is the IDEA that even sincere believers will do these things - just because it is obedient to God to do so. That's COMPLIANCE, and compliance almost never lasts, and certainly doesn't flow from a joyful heart.**
- **This philosophy of obedience rarely works- again, in a self-sustaining way- because it ignores an essential question that ALWAYS accompanies true obedience to God. That is**

‡ **The question of MOTIVATION**

- **When it comes to our motivation to live in obedience to God, there are plenty of what I'll call FALSE MOTIVATORS... or insufficient motivators- which generally could fall in the category of RELIGIOUS COERCION.**
 - **Guilt**
 - **Fear of punishment**
 - **Promise of reward**
 - **Gratitude... wait, that's a good one. And it is, and there are few things as central to the NT as gratitude. But mark it down, if our only motivation of obedience to God is a sense of Gratitude, even for our salvation itself, over time that motivation will fade.**
 - **If you give someone an incredible gift, but then expect them to do everything you ask over a long period of time, eventually that will become pretty thin....**
- **SO, what is the TRUE MOTIVATION that leads us, as followers of Christ, to be... well, truly FOLLOWERS of Christ. Obedient to God, not out of compliance, but from our HEARTS.**
- **AND THAT leads us to where we are in ACTS.**
- **Five weeks ago we saw Peter and John arrested for the first time- hauled before the Sanhedrin and commanded to cease speaking about Jesus. In Chap 4:19-20, Peter and John replied... "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."**
- **And that is just what all the Apostles continued to do, on the temple mount, in open defiance of the Sanhedrin's authority. And as God continues to grow the church, the Sanhedrin continues to grow in its anger and jealousy of all that his happening.**

‡ **Picking up the story: Acts 5:17**

¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.

¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.

– **FIRST miracle of deliverance**

²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."

²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

‡ **Inside the Temple courts**

- **Subtle.. Before, we are told that the people were gathered, and the apostles teaching, on 'Solomon's colonnade, or porch' This was a long area on the side of the broader temple mount, not far, but somewhat removed from the outer court wall of the temple itself.**

- **NOW, the angel told them to go into the temple courts proper... if the Sanhedrin was upset about them preaching on outer boundary of the temple mount, they would be furious about them doing this actually inside the temple courts.**
- **But even more, remember what the Temple represented. It was a PHYSICAL location where a special class of people- chief among them the high priest- acted as an intermediary between the people and God, at certain times of the day and year.**
- **NOW, the message preached by the Apostles, proclaimed that the presence of God was available to ALL, with NO intermediary, ALL THE TIME, through faith in CHRIST.**
- **As we will explore more in depth later in Acts, the apostles are proclaiming the GOOD NEWS of the NEW COVENANT, while standing in the very core of the OLD COVENANT- and old system and structure that Christ had REPLACED, and that was NO LONGER NECESSARY.**
- **Through the Angel, God commands them to preach the miracle of A NEW LIFE, and this new life was NOT dependent upon any of the physical and religious trappings of the OLD LIFE- the temple or the system it represented.**
- **And now Luke describes a scene that is almost funny in its contrast between the purposes of God and the impotence of the Sanhedrin to stop what God is doing.**

✠ A stark contrast

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were **at a loss**, wondering what this might lead to.

- **I bet they were! To touch on this again... this is picture of power of PRIDE and self-protection to render us spiritually blind! Every day it is more apparent this is GOD AT WORK- and not God generically, but work of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, working through the Apostles and the community of faith. NOW, these leaders are faced with the reality that their own jail won't hold the apostles, and they still do not recognize this as being God at work... that just maybe, they are the ones resisting God.**
- **In our own lives, we need to recognize the reason at times we miss what God is doing- or wanting to do in our own lives, marriages, other contexts... is because we allow our own pride or desire for self-protection to keep us from seeing and hearing what God is so plainly doing and wanting us to hear.**
- **Perhaps this is part of what Jesus meant when he would so often end a teaching by saying “if you have ears to hear, then hear”... may we be people whose ears and hearts are open to hear and see what God is saying and doing.**
- **SO, if the Sanhedrin was wondering what this might lead to, they quickly found out!**

²⁵ Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

- **Quick note - At this point, apostles are still so popular with the people of Jerusalem, that temple guards are careful not to upset crowds, But this is going to change, suddenly and radically. We are just weeks away from martyrdom of the Stephen, who was killed by being**

stoned- by the members of the Sanhedrin. But when this happens, the people of Jerusalem did not come to his defense.

²⁷ *The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.*

²⁸ *“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”*

- **And friends, HERE we see the contrast between the blindness of these religious leaders and the courage of the Apostles. Faced with the very real threat of imprisonment, torture, or even death...**

²⁹ *Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!*

† **What led to the apostle’s courageous obedience to God? What can we learn from this story?**

- **Standing before the Sanhedrin, the apostles didn’t risk their lives just because God told them to do so.**
 - **They didn’t risk their lives because of Jesus’ great commission he had given them just months before**
 - **It wasn’t a life time of biblical and moral teaching, or even what they had seen Jesus do over the three years they spent with him.**
 - **It wasn’t even their intellectual knowledge that Jesus was raised from the dead.**
 - **THE APOSTLES responded with miraculous courage, trust, and obedience because of the miracle the Angel spoke of back in verse 20.**
- “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”**
- **YOU SEE...**

† **The apostles obeyed God not just because they had been given a command- but because they had been given a NEW LIFE**

- **God HAD given them a NEW COMMAND, and they obeyed God’s commands with all of who they were, because they had been made NEW CREATIONS.**
- **AND CHURCH! THE NEW LIFE the apostles were proclaiming is the SAME NEW LIFE God calls us into now, and that as a believer you have already received. THIS IS the LIFE OF CHRIST himself, dwelling in us, making us ONE WITH CHRIST by the Holy Spirit, and transforming us day by day into the EXPERIENCE- in our souls/ MWE... of the NEW LIFE, NEW REALITY, that is already ours.**
- **Can imagine the apostles thinking... OF COURSE we are obeying God. How could we NOT obey God. HE IS EVERYTHING. HE IS OUR VERY LIFE.**

† **Our question- How is God calling ME into obedience?**

- **CHURCH... How is God calling you into obedience?**
 - **Could be there is a sin, a place of rebellion, a chain, that his holding you captive and harming you.. or those around you. God may be leading you to trust him in obedience to surrender, lay this down, get help, make amends.... Let him do the work...**
 - **Could be fear. A specific fear of something you are facing, or just the pervasive general anxiety that so many face in this time in which we live. Could it be that God is calling**

you to the obedience of trust, maybe to talk to someone, and ultimately to lay your fear at God's feet, and choose to daily look to HIM for peace and hope

- ***Could be obedience of being the essential part of HIS BODY- his church- that he has created you to be. As the writer of Hebrews proclaimed in Hebrews 10:24-25***

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

- ***Could be a step forward, something God is calling you to do, or to say.***
- ***Could be an act of generosity, of compassion, of love.***
- ***Whatever it may be, HOW IS GOD CALLING YOU TO OBEDIENCE. That's an essential question... but it's not the ONLY QUESTION.***

† If you truly desire to grow in obedience to God, then the real question is.... Is Christ your SOURCE of life?

- ***Do you even understand that this is His great desire for you?***
- ***See, when we are faced with a choice of obedience...if our relationship with Christ is just PART of who we are, a religious activity we do from time to time... then it is very likely your own wisdom/strength/desires- what NT calls our flesh- is going to win that decision.***
- † ***When we are living by the Spirit, , living in the GOOD of Christ's life in us, knowing HIM as our source,when Christ is our Life, then choosing obedience wont' be just what we OUGHT to do, but what we can't HELP but do***