

### Obey God and not man (Acts 5:12-32)

**Neil Marten**, a member of the British Parliament, was once giving a group of his constituents a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. During the course of the visit, the group happened to meet Lord Hailsham, then Lord Chancellor, wearing all the regalia of his office. Hailsham recognized Marten among the group and cried, "Neil!" Not daring to question or disobey the "command," the entire band of visitors promptly fell to their knees!

**Our text follows** on the story of two disobedient people whom God struck dead as a warning to the early church against the deadly sin of hypocrisy. Verses 12-16 show the church recovering from that frightening incident, reporting both the atmosphere in the church and in the surrounding community. No hypocrites dared to join them, for fear of being struck dead! And yet the Lord was adding many more—Luke has stopped counting—to the church. And the apostles were performing extraordinary miracles of healing and deliverance.

**It is in this context** of great power and popularity that the Jewish leaders rose up against the apostles, putting them in prison. But the Lord sent an angel to deliver them, and in so doing shows us the theme of this story (5:20): "Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." That command was sure to get them into big trouble! They had just been arrested, but now they are to go right back into the most conspicuous place of all and continue proclaiming the gospel.

**But they didn't question** the command. They didn't even go out for breakfast first. They obeyed (5:21), leading to their arrest again. When the high priest confronted them for disobeying their earlier commands, filling Jerusalem with their teaching (5:28), Peter again states the theme (5:29): "We must obey God rather than men." Peter preaches a short sermon to the Sanhedrin, emphasizing again the issue of obedience (5:32).

**When the high** priest and his cronies wanted to kill the apostles, Gamaliel intervened, resulting in their being flogged and ordered again to speak no more in the name of Jesus (5:40). So what did the apostles do? "Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (5:42)! They were unstoppable in their obedience to God, especially on the matter of proclaiming the good news about Jesus.

Our text reveals three characteristics of Obedient Christians.

1. **Obedient Christians will know** the Lord's power through the Holy Spirit.

**The early church experienced** the Lord's power through the many miracles performed by the apostles (5:12, 15, 16), and through powerful witness and the resulting powerful conversions of sinners. Jesus had told the apostles that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them to be His witnesses (1:8). Peter testifies to the Sanhedrin that it was the Holy Spirit in them that was the source of their power (5:32).

The passage from Acts report that many were brought from far and wide so that even Peter's shadow could fall upon them and make them well. Others were tormented by evil spirits and they too were made well.

The purpose for God granting these miracles was to confirm the gospel message and to authenticate these men as God's messengers in these early days of the church (Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12).

**But as we continue** to read the book of Acts, we see that the Holy Spirit was the driving force of the early church. Through visions and dreams the Holy Spirit directed the ministry of the church to the Gentiles not just in Asia but in Greece and beyond.

Paul had to give teaching and direction about the misuse of the Holy Spirit's gifts that were present in Corinth. In Galatia, Paul had to teach about the work of the Spirit bringing its fruit of love joy peace etc into the life of the believer. He talked about not stifling the Spirit in one's life but to walk in the Spirit.

**The outpouring** of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was never a one off but was to be the normal Christian life. While Pentecost was never reproduced, the outpouring of the Spirit upon people, churches and communities has continued.

The tragedy is that Christians and Churches have been frightened of the Holy Spirit because of the mess that He can create like people falling down laughing or staggering around. People are frightened because when the Holy Spirit moves, control is lost and we do not like losing control.

**We all have the** Spirit of God inside but do we want to live in the Spirit. We all have a choice. Do we want to be empowered by the Holy Spirit? In other words do you want the Holy Spirit to flow through you? Do you want to pray and see people healed, lives transformed by the gospel and God being experienced.

Obedience to flow with the Holy Spirit will bring great fruit and blessings. For Obedient Christians know and live by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**2. Obedient Christians** do not live in the land of Jealousy.

Last week we learnt about the land of But where we say one thing but really do not live it. We say that God heals but... We say that we believe that all things are possible with God but... and so the list goes on.

Today the Pharisees and Sadducees entered the land of But. This time it was not hypocrisy that was their down fall but their jealousy.

***But the high*** priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.

Jealousy means

1. jealous resentment against a rival, a person enjoying success or advantage, etc., or against another's success or advantage itself:

2.mental uneasiness from suspicion or fear of rivalry, unfaithfulness, etc., as in love or aims.

3.vigilance in maintaining or guarding something.

4.a jealous feeling, disposition, state, or mood.

The danger is that anger is the room mate of jealousy that can lead to some very dangerous actions.

**In the OT Joseph** was favoured by his father and was given a multi-coloured coat. The brothers were jealous of Joseph. It did not help that young Joe said that his brothers were going to bow down to him. The brothers responded by trying to kill him. But God had a bigger plan.

**Saul was jealous** of young David's achievements especially when the people cheered that Saul had killed thousands but David tens of thousands. David would have greatly benefited King Saul and Israel, but because Saul was jealous of David, he became his enemy, showing how much damage a jealous spirit can be to someone but also to those around them.

**In the New Testament** in Corinth the many members of the whole church were jealous of the spiritual gifts that others had from speaking in tongues to prophecy.

**Being jealous** indicates that we are not satisfied with what God has given us. Being jealous is close to coveting what someone else has or a position that someone holds. Joseph's brothers were filled with jealousy over him, the Corinthian church had a problem of being jealous of one another's spiritual gifts, and just like King Saul in being jealous over David. What we can learn from these examples is that there is no reason to be jealous of one another. God is not going to respect one person over another. We are all God's children and have unique calls in our lives, so rather than be jealous of others position or possessions in life, why not accept what God has done through their lives and work together for the common good of the church, because a house divided cannot stand, and a little bit of jealousy can do a lot of harm to others and even to

one's self.

### 3. **Obedient Christians** obey God over civil and church authorities.

**The authorities**, filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and put them in jail. The angel of the Lord comes and opens the doors of the jail. Many fail to note that while the apostles performed many great miracles, and the angel miraculously delivered them from prison, the angel did not spare them from being flogged. (There is a bit of humour here: on God's side since the Sadducees did not believe in angels, the Lord sent one to deliver the apostles!)

The angel releases them and commands them to go back to the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life. They go back and speak. Meanwhile, the authorities realize that they are not in jail. They find them out preaching and now this time they brought before the Sanhedrin to question them. They are not impressed that the apostles did not comply with their orders.

**Peter replied that their** first obedience is to God and His orders and not to man. This will be our growing challenge as we find ourselves not in the majority but in the minority and we are compelled to do the bidding of the authorities. History is filled with Christians opposing civil and church authorities. The more familiar is Wilbur Wilberforce and the removal of the slave trade and Rev Martin Luther King and the American Civil Rights movement. But there have been more unsung heroes who have stood up for God rather than man.

**We are moving** into a period where we will be needed to stand up and obey God. The Bible commands us as Christians to be subject to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-14), even when these authorities are evil people. But if the governing authorities command us to do something that would be disobedient to God, then we must obey God, even if it results in our being punished. Christians disagree over civil disobedience on the matter of abortion. While it is evil for our government to permit abortion, and we should pray and work to see the evil laws overturned, the government is not forcing us to abort our children (as the Chinese government does). If it came to that, we then should disobey the government. If the government said that we could not meet as Christians or teach what the Bible says about homosexuality, abortion, or other moral issues, we must disobey the government.

**There was an item** in the news recently, concerning the Bishop of Hereford. The Bishop had turned down a man for an appointment in his diocese because of his gay lifestyle, and found himself in court being charged under the new Sexual Orientation Regulations. Actually, as the Bishop explained to the Court, he had turned down the man, not for being gay, but because of his active homosexuality: he would equally have turned him down if he had been heterosexual, and engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage. But- at the end of the day, he had been obedient to God, rather than to man.

**4. Obedient Christians boldly** and persistently proclaim the message of life in Jesus Christ, no matter what the cost.

This is Peter's second opportunity before the Sanhedrin. God was gracious to give these evil men another chance to respond to the gospel. In his first encounter, Peter had not minced words (4:10-12). He told these men that they had crucified Jesus, but that God had raised Him from the dead. Further, Jesus was the chief cornerstone which had been rejected by them, the builders. And, there is salvation in no one else. When he gets his second chance, Peter again confronts them with putting Jesus to death by their own hands, by hanging Him on a tree (lit., 5:30). Peter was accusing them of despising Jesus as one accursed of God (Deut. 27:26). He was not tiptoeing around the issue of sin!

There are a number of things we need to note about our proclamation.

1. The proclamation must help people face their sinfulness of their lives.
2. The proclamation involves exalting Jesus Christ
3. The proclamation involves the call to return to God and receive His grace and forgiveness
4. The proclamation needs to be bold and persistent

5. The proclamation will be met by varied responses and we should not be put off by this.

The churches who are growing are those who are proclaiming the salvation of Christ from the pulpit and through the people who attend. But numbers are not just the only way to measure obedience.

For we know of ministers and missionaries who have laboured long and hard, proclaiming the gospel, but the fruit was minimal.

**Richard Greenham** served as a pastor just outside of Cambridge, England, from 1570-1590. He rose daily at four and each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday preached to his congregation at daybreak before they went into their fields. On Sunday he preached twice, and on Sunday nights and Thursday mornings he catechised the children. He was a godly and faithful man who, as he put it, preached Christ crucified unto my self and the country people. Yet his ministry was virtually fruitless. He told his successor that he perceived no good wrought by his ministry on any but one family.

Richard Baxter ministered at Kidderminster, England, from 1641-1660, except for five years during the civil war. It was a town of about 2,000 adults. When he came, he found them an ignorant, rude, and reveling people. Hardly one family on a street professed to follow God. The church held about 1,000, but it proved to be too small. They had to build five galleries to hold the crowds. On the Lord's Day, as you walked the streets, you would hear hundreds of families singing psalms and repeating the sermons. When Baxter left, on many streets there would hardly be a single family that did not follow the Lord. (These stories told by J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* [Crossway Books], pp. 43-45).

Why the difference between these two men's ministries? Both men obeyed God no matter what. God's sovereignty is the only explanation. Both men will receive the Lord's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

**Obedient Christians obey God and not man**