

9/6/15

Acts 5:21-29

A Costly Obedience

***21** And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. **22** But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, **23** “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” **24** Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. **25** And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” **26** Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. **27** And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, **28** saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” **29** But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.*

The driving verse in this passage Verse 29 has become increasingly relevant in the last week or so.

The punch in Verse 29 comes when Peter and the Apostles answer, “We must obey God rather than man.”

It's become relevant because of unfolding events in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. It happened in Rowan County when a Clerk of Court named Kim Davis refused to issue marriage licenses to gay couples.

I don't want to deify or make a martyr out of Kim Davis; I'll leave that to the politicians. I simply want to call your attention to the fact that in the United States of America in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, a County Clerk has been jailed because her Christian conviction would not allow her to issue a license for marriage she did not believe was legitimate.

I bring this up not as a rallying cry for Kim Davis or a battle cry for a culture war. Our vision is not to build *culture warriors* but *Christ followers*. And followers of Christ must choose in a 1,000 different ways every day if we are going to obey the culture's trendy ways or if we are going to follow the Crucified One. That is how we get at this passage.

We are once again in the middle of a story. In Acts 5 signs and wonders were done among the people, so much so that in verses 17-18, the Apostles were thrown into jail. Then in verse 19, an angel of the Lord appears to them, frees them from prison and tells them to go back and preach again in the same spot; and when they do, they are completely defiant to the law of the land. And their obedience to God is costly.

That's what we, too, have to grapple with: Living in the shadow of the cross with wholehearted obedience and genuine joy. This will separate the fish from the fowl. There is a great joy in obedience to God, but we are going to find that:

Obedience to God is a Costly Joy

Obedience Must Be a Foregone Conclusion (A Settled Matter)

By that I mean you decide to obey in *peacetime* so you know what to do in *wartime*. The Apostles' decision to obey was made at the time of their conversion. That is when their hearts were awakened to their own sin and God granted them faith to believe and they renounced their sin and placed their faith in Christ.

That's when you decide to obey. You hear it in the language. When the Apostles are re-arrested in Verse 27 and charged in Verse 28, notice their response. **27** *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."* **29** *But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."*

G. Campbell Morgan points out that in Verse 29 the Disciples used the word "must," not the word "ought." They said "We must obey," not "We ought to obey." There is an ocean of difference between the word "must" and the word "ought." The word "ought" says "that sounds like a good idea and there would be something advantageous in it for me and my family," as in "I ought to go to church." "I ought to read my Bible." "I ought to quit chewing tobacco." "I ought to lose some weight."

"Ought" typically means something sounds like a good idea. And so many believers live in the world of "ought" when that's really not what you signed up for at all. We didn't sign up for *ought*. We signed up for *must*. We must obey God rather than man, declaring "I've put down my rights and obligations, my hurts and fears, my desires and fancies, and said 'By God's grace, I must obey.'" The word "must" has the force of a surrendered will and a changed heart. The word "must" has the flavor of Lordship and the feel of conviction.

Obedience must be a *settled* matter so that, when Satan tempts you with the junk food of this world, you're able to resist because your soul has feasted on the riches of Christ and the Glory of God. But how do we get there? What does this obedience look like and how can I learn it? Let me point to a couple of words from the text.

Immediately. As soon as you know what God desires from you – do it. Delayed obedience muddies clear thinking and puts you at risk. To see this, read verses 20-21.

While the Apostles are in prison, the angel comes and frees them. They received instructions and immediately went into action. James says in James 4:17, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” Confront sin. Make the call. Repair the marriage. Forsake the adultery. **Immediately.**

Strategically – Obey so that God will receive the most glory regardless of what it costs you. Verse 21 tells us they entered the temple at daybreak. Daybreak would be when the most people were there ready to hear the Gospel message. And God would be glorified. It’s good for you to think in terms of Christian strategies. How can you maximize the rest of your life so that God can receive the most glory from you? Part of following Christ is totally reorienting your future career, your retirement, so that Christ receives the most glory. For some of you, that means an active obedience, not some passive “if it’s convenient” Christianity. There’s too much at stake.

Uncompromisingly – That’s where the “must” comes into play in Verse 29. We *must* obey. You can reach back into church history and find so many faithful men and women who understood costly obedience.

Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation by nailing his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg. When he was brought to trial at the Diet of Worms and was told to recant his belief in Grace Alone by Faith Alone in Christ Alone, Luther said, “I *cannot* and *will not* recant anything to go against conscience. It’s neither safe nor right. I can do no other. Here I stand so help me God.” Obedience to God is a settled matter immediately, strategically, uncompromisingly. It’s a costly joy.

Obedience to God Must Be Christ-Centered and Cross Focused

We find this in verses 27-28, the cross-centered, cross-focused nature of this passage. **27** *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”* It is odd that these verses don’t mention the miraculous freeing of the Apostles. But notice how uncomfortable they are talking about Jesus. In Verse 28 we read that their hearts were so hard they refused to even *mention* the name of Jesus. In a negative tone, they referred to “this man.”

In Acts 4:17 the authorities had told them to speak no more in this name. Do you see how they’re trying to avoid the name of Jesus? Yet in fact, this actually brought *more* attention to the name of Jesus. There is a real Christ-centeredness to this message and a real sense that God is in control. The Sanhedrin kept warning and arresting the Apostles and God kept bringing them out of jail and filled Jerusalem with teaching about Jesus.

Verse 28 says, “You intend to bring this man’s blood on us.” It’s the crucifixion. Peter said that very thing in Acts 2:23: *“This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”* He

says it again in Acts 2:36; *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ whom you crucified.”* And in Acts 3:15, Peter says, *“You killed the author of life whom God raised from the dead.”* Again in Acts 4:10, Peter says, *let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.* And we note it in Stephen’s speech in Acts 7: *“When the righteous one came, you betrayed and murdered him.”*

The problem *then* is really the same problem we face *now*. It’s the problem of the cross. What do we do with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ? It’s the breakpoint of discipleship and the flashpoint of conversion and it’s at the cross where sinful man meets a Holy God and is accepted, adopted, chosen and changed.

Paul said in I Corinthians 1:23, *“but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* The Cross has the power to save and forgive you, the wisdom to guide and sustain you. Today, you can bring your guilt and share your broken life and shattered dreams and leave them at the Cross and embrace the costly joy of obedience.

(Pastor Prays)