

Series: Purposeful	Reference: Acts 5:29	Title: Peter: The Path to Obedience	Date: 02.24.18
Website Writeup:			
<i>We live in a culture which seems hostile to the message of Christ, at the least in perception. Will we choose to obey Christ, or accommodate? Today we look at how Peter & the Apostles responded to the same pressures.</i>			

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We're spending a few weeks looking at our purpose as individuals & as the Church through the lens of different personalities in Scripture. **You know the term 'Linchpin' meaning the thing that holds everything else together. A linchpin being that one pin which goes into the axel holding the wheel on a cart or what have you. Without the linchpin nothing works, the wheels fall off! But with the linchpin it all works, you can be mobile.**

Matthew 28:18-20 is the linchpin passage in understanding our purpose as Christians in the local Body of Christ. His last command, our first concern. We cannot be cloudy concerning our purpose, and our purpose is God's Glory & God's Mission as it relates to this passage.

Why does the local church even exist & matter? It's not just for community...

God instituted the church, choosing to work through it to reveal His Glory to the world, and in that, He's given us purpose. Without a purpose larger than ourselves there'd be no use in talking about spiritual transformation. Change for change's sake is useless, it must be towards a greater purpose, which is God's Glory & God's mission of reaching all nations/peoples.

If heaven is the *only* goal of the Gospel, then discipleship is merely an option - but heaven is not our ultimate goal - God's glory & mission are. There's something lacking in our walk if we don't grow & engage in the making of disciples. Christy said it well in our Community Group this last week - discipleship is reproductive. It's not just for leadership, but for all Christians to engage in. It is an act of love.

It's been said, *the local church is the hope of the world.* Not because we're all that, or have great community, worship, rousing sermons, etc. Rather because, (1) we are the bearers of Truth (1 Ti 3:15) in proclaiming Jesus crucified & resurrected, and (2) we are an extension of Jesus Body, revealing His love & glory in action towards others (Mt 5:16). All for God's Glory in reconciling all people groups to God - His Mission.

Jesus mentions the church on a few occasions as a tool of the Kingdom of God, a mechanism to bring about His Kingdom initiative. We see this in Matthew 16:18-19 where Jesus says he'll build his church, not even hell will overcome it & that the Church holds the keys to the Kingdom. Jesus preached 'the Kingdom of God' constantly, set in

motion the local church. Because the Kingdom of God births the Church - the Church is the tool of the Kingdom - to bring about his Glory & Mission. The Kingdom Reign of God, the ultimate hope & goal.

It's natural for us who've understood this in the past to have mission or purpose drift - to forget, or become misguided in the purpose of the church. Our focus shifts to buildings, forms of worship, or community, or personality worship, rather than existing for the Glory & Mission of God. And there are some who are totally unconcerned about any of this, but yet they still come to church. That's great, I hope the Spirit breaks through in a person like that - they belong before they believe. Sticking around long enough running the risk of actually becoming people of God's purpose.

The question is, how do we glorify God in all we do in light of His Mission? It means what we do & how we choose to live is important, and it all must drive towards God's Glory & Mission. Our worship should drive that way. Our teaching should drive that way. Our prayer ministry, what we do with our children, should all drive that way. Everything's spiritual. Everything forms us spiritually - what it forms us to is the question. Towards Christlikeness leading to God's Glory & Mission, or towards something else? Things can look great & even feel great, but if they're not driving towards God's desires, it's ultimately damaging. God's work needs to be done God's way.

We exist in all we do to glorify God. We build each other up & equip the Saints for the Glory of God & His Mission to reach the world. So, at the end of the day each of us has to sit here & maturely say, *"It's not about me, it's about Jesus."* If we can get to that point, we'll make decisions, like we saw with Moses & Nehemiah in past weeks, towards God's glory & mission; asking in everything we do, "Would greater glory be gained for God & His Mission be extended if we do A, B or C." If we don't understand our purpose, there's no reason to change. But when we get a vision bigger than ourselves, we're willing to sacrifice to get there.

Today we look at Peter & the other Apostles centering on one verse, Acts 5:29... *"But Peter & the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"*

Obedience to Jesus sounds wonderful, yet in reality, it often leads to relational difficulties, confrontation & oppression when we actually do God's work, God's way. Like we said last week, we come against spiritual attack & opposition, and without the deeper greater purpose of God's Glory & Mission, we won't endure it long.

If you use the Lectio Divina Journals, you may've read Psalm 120 this week - vv5-7 struck me there...⁵ *Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek (scattered in a foreign land), that I live among the tents of Kedar! (in the places of darkness)* ⁶ *Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.* ⁷ *I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.*

Doesn't life feel like that sometimes - things feel dark & foreign, and everybody's just angry, and all you're saying is, *"Jesus loves you!"* We won't endure all that without God's clearly defined purpose. The context of Acts 5 demonstrates this very principle. In our

ministry to others, we might get easily discouraged when people don't readily accept Jesus, but it was no different in Biblical times.

Peter & the other Apostles were experiencing spiritual kickback in Acts 5. Verse 28 resonates with our day as well - leaders were ordering them not to teach about Jesus... *"...didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name?"* Doesn't it feel like we're being told the same in our culture? The name of Jesus isn't welcome among leaders & preservers of culture. Plainly pop-culture is not too Jesus friendly. Followers of Jesus need to prioritize their decision-making, and align carefully to the conviction of only seeking God's favor & not the favor of culture or individuals. When we strive for acceptance & popularity in life & ministry, we often miss out on the blessing of God's providence. We bend, accommodate, compromise & water down the message & we become spiritually impotent, like all the other straw-man spiritualities out there.

Sometimes people leave church; they move away due to career, or schooling. That's hard. Some leave for different reasons & that's harder. Maybe they leave over preference. They don't like the worship, or the pastors style. Sometimes they leave because the church wasn't what they expected. Leadership didn't choose to institute their preferences - since it's all about what they like, not about the greater purpose of God's Glory & Mission. I'm all for Believers finding a place which is a 'good fit' & preference is not all evil, but when preference trumps purpose, there's a problem, because we know the *eternal* always trumps the *temporal*. Content is more important than form, content is eternal, form is changing.

Right now we are seeing many churches sacrifice content for form. They're actually changing their message & holding dearly to a faded form of church. They will go the way of the dinosaur given all style becomes antiquated. Whereas the content of a good love poem or song lyric for instance, will last the test of time given the solid content. The question is, what gives God Glory & furthers his mission - preference always comes second.

To understand this one verse response from the Apostles we need to know what prompted it. We see this in verses 12-16, *¹²"The apostles performed many signs & wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴Nevertheless, more & more men & women believed in the Lord & were added to their number. ¹⁵As a result, people brought the sick into the streets & laid them on beds & mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick & those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed."*

There's a great work of God going on here among the masses. This whole chapter is about Christians doing Kingdom work God's way, and the importance of integrity in that. The Apostles are portrayed in a positive light, doing it well, despite the trouble it brings them. Ananias & Sapphira, in vv1-11, are portrayed in a negative light in the sense

they acted greedily. They weren't in this for God's Glory & Mission, rather they were in it for themselves.

Verses 12-16 describe God's miraculous work & many commit their lives to following Jesus. Yet the religious leaders, who chose a different path, were resistant & antagonistic toward the Apostles & had them imprisoned as we see in verses 17 & 18. However, then in verses 19 & 20 we see God honors obedience to their central calling, miraculously setting the Apostles free from jail to continue their ministry among the people.

17 Then the high priest & all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles & put them in the public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail & brought them out. 20 "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." (Ac 5:17-20)

So the question is, do we readily choose the path of obedience over cultural norms, or popularity? Even at cost to ourselves? Here are some points to think on as we consider these questions...

Firstly, When God's clearly at work, Believers should expect various responses because of the spiritual blindness of humankind. The crowds appreciated the signs, many were made whole & renewed, yet many of the religious leaders remained blind to Jesus.

When our Community Groups are interacting with people in the community, those crowds are full of complicated people, from various backgrounds, viewpoints, outlooks & maybe a differing worldview. At times people will respond well to the message of Jesus from us.

I said in one recent sermon - we often assume people are antagonistic towards the Gospel, or a simple invite to church. However statistics show 50% of Americans are still curious & open to invite. In the right moment, they would openly discuss what or who Jesus is with us - but we often make the mistake of thinking people are closed & even hostile to Christ, or us as Christians. The point is, we don't know until we take the risk.

Others operate out of a void of anything Christian, they're not antagonistic at all, they've just never thought about it - a crowd which seems to be increasing as we enter into the first unchurched age of America.

Others are operating out of real, or perceived past hurt by the church, or misinformation about the Church, churning up anger which they express freely. I've experienced them & we must realize, they're not the enemy, they're simply misinformed, need healing, or trapped. Someone said to me this week they thought the church was angry & bitter until they started showing up & actually read the Gospel of Mark, and saw a different reality. In every encounter, I want people to walk away feeling more loved than they did before they met me, and hopefully to have heard & seen at the least a part of the Gospel in my

life. I'm usually not expecting a leap of faith, but do want to chip away at the wall - to bring them a baby step closer to Jesus through my words & witness.

Which is my **second point**. In Acts 5 we are faced with the responses of various individuals in relation to Jesus; acceptance, gratitude, jealousy, antagonism, fear & pride. When you share the Gospel, what responses do you expect & receive mostly? I think our collective witness along the Eastern Main Line, has been anything from one of redeeming peoples view of Church, to seeing them come to faith! The latter are people who never thought they'd follow Jesus! We've encountered little antagonism.

Thirdly, obedience to God is always better than capitulation & people actually respect a person with strong conviction, although they may disagree with them - as long as disagreement is expressed with respect & love. God's purpose must take the place of priority over & above everything else in our lives. Yet we do that with all respect & humility as it states in *1 Peter 3:15-17...in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness & respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

Peter & friends practiced what we preached last week - to not get derailed by the distractions. And when they were brought back in, they went without complaint, speaking plainly & openly about Christ as 1 Peter 3 directs. In doing so, they reflected chapter 4 verse 11 as well...¹¹ *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory & the power for ever & ever. Amen.*

Fourthly, Acts 5 is a reminder, God often delivers His people in difficult times in order that they might continue to proclaim His goodness among the nations. The story goes in Acts 5:19-20...*during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail & brought them out. ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."*

Not only does God liberate, but He empowers for works of ministry leading to His glory & which builds into His purpose. We so often worry more about what people might think, or what may happen to us, especially career wise, if we should be bold in our faith. Something might! But God's alive & will not leave you shattered. He doesn't use His people up & throw them out, He cares for them & leads them to greater opportunity.

Moses taught us to make godly decisions in relation to our purpose. Nehemiah taught us to not get distracted in our purpose. And Peter teaches us the importance of obedience to God above anything else.

A few parting thoughts & questions... (1) God's work must take priority over popularity with people. In what ways do you have a proclivity toward people-pleasing, instead of God? (2) Obedience to God's purpose comes at a personal cost. Are you willing to pay the personal price in order that you may demonstrate obedience to God? And (3), in what ways can you testify to God's saving power at work in your life & ministry? (4) Are you bold in obedience as a witness of Jesus? Have you been bold to share your faith with someone? (5) Who's God brought into your life to whom you might share the Gospel? List a few people to whom you might stretch yourself to witness, considering practical ways to bless them - use the *All Things Rise* postcards to invite these people to our Easter Series, or at the least the Easter Service. (6) What's your response to opposition to being a witness for Christ? Would you demonstrate the attitude displayed by the Apostles in Acts 5?

Go home, reread all of Acts 5, meditate on it, and ask the Holy Spirit to unpack your life, bringing people to mind to whom you might witness to for God's Glory & Purpose. Ask for boldness. Remember...

- You don't have to share everything in one conversation.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to speak through you, and give you the words.
- Just move the conversation to the idea of Christ's love for them.
- Pray for them on the spot.
- Invite them to church.
- Give them an All Things Rise Easter Service Card.
- Share what God's been doing in your life or saying to you from your quiet times - no one can argue your experience!