

Lent: A Time For Renewal of Obedience

1 Peter 5:6

February 29, 2012

Lent 2

There is a story about a young man who was in the army. When his duty time was over, he went looking for a job. He applied for a job and the boss there wanted to interview him. The boss discovered that he had been in the army and he wanted to know what kind of work he had done in the army. So he asked him, "What did you do in the army?" The young man answered, "Anything my commander told me to do, I did it." Notice that he didn't make a list of things he did and didn't do. He simply said he did whatever his commander wanted.

Suppose that somebody found out that you are a Christian and somebody said, "What do you Christians do?" Would you answer by listing activities? We pray, read the Bible, worship, and so on? Or, would you answer, "Anything God tells me to do, I do that!"? We may not feel comfortable with that second answer. Do *anything* God says? When we think about God, we like to think of His grace, love, forgiveness and blessings. But God also calls us to *obey* Him.

The verse I recently read says that we should become humble. That is the attitude of a slave. He is under his master and must obey his master without complaint. God created people to have the same attitude - humility - and live under Him in obedience. But the first people, Adam and Eve, changed all of that. God created them and put them in a beautiful garden. God said, "You can eat fruit from every tree in the garden, but the tree in the middle of the garden - you must not eat that." Satan came in the guise of a snake and tempted Eve, "If you eat from that tree, you can be like God." Eve decided she did not want to be a humble servant obeying God, but to become the boss and decide things for herself. So she ate and gave to Adam and he ate. That was the first sin: not obeying, but trying to become the boss.

Ever since then people have been the same. We are not naturally humble creatures, but exalted and proud people. We don't want to be the servant. We want to be the boss. We don't want to obey. We want to make the rules. We don't want to do God's desires. We want to do our desires.

Why? God's ways are often hard. His will is often at odds with the world's ways. Our world says, "Think of yourselves." God says, "Think of others." Our world says, "Get a lot for yourself and enjoy yourself." God says, "Share and serve other people." The world says, "If you do right, you will succeed." God says, "If you obey Me, then people will reject you and persecute you, and you will suffer." The world says, "Work hard and become famous and successful for yourselves." God says, "Become humble under the mighty hand of God."

So what do we do? We may ignore His commands and feel that they are not for us. I have often been amazed when talking to people who have sinned. I show them God's command from Scripture and they look at me with a blank stare, shrug their shoulders, and don't care.

We may feel God's commands and laws are too hard so we rebel against Him and disobey His commands. People feel that God's command to worship together in church often is too hard. They say, "Sunday is my only day of rest with my family." So they refuse to obey. People feel that God's command to give a percentage of our income for building His Kingdom is too hard. They say, "I have so many bills and I deserve a little fun." So they refuse to obey. God's command to children to obey their parents and people who have authority over them - children feel that's too hard and they don't want to do it. God's command regarding sexuality - between a one man and one woman in marriage - people feel that is hopelessly old fashioned. They refuse to obey it. There are many other examples.

Yet God still calls us to humble obedience. How is that possible? We can't do it. God must do it. In our text, it says, You should become humble under God's mighty hand. For? He will exalt you at the right time."

That right time has already happened. God has already exalted us. He did that by sending His Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus demonstrated perfect humility. Although He is the Son of God and the ruler of the universe, Jesus humbled himself and became a man. And while Jesus lived here on earth, Jesus demonstrated perfect obedience. Our Bible lesson for tonight is a good example.

Sin began in a garden named Eden because Adam and Eve were weak and disobeyed. Jesus went to a garden named GETHSEMANE to pray for strength to obey. God the Father wanted Jesus to do something very difficult -- suffer and die on a cross. Jesus prays that it may not happen if possible. But, Jesus says, "Yet, let your will happen, not my will." Jesus is willing to obey God's will, even though it is hard and causes suffering for Him. Jesus did obey God. The next day, He did suffer and die on the cross.

Jesus' humiliation and obedience does two things for us. First of all, Jesus' becoming humble and willingness to obey God even though it meant death on a cross - that takes away our prior mistakes. Jesus' death on the cross forgives our stubborn pride, our rebellion against God, our refusal to obey God. Jesus' death means that God exalts us. Before we were sinners deserving death. Now, we are His children who have received life eternal in heaven.

Secondly, His perfect obedience becomes our perfect obedience. The Bible says, "One man (*Adam*) disobeyed God and many people became sinners. But in the same way, one man (*Christ*) obeyed God and many people will be made holy." What does this mean? We are all sinners because Adam sinned long ago and we share his sin. But now we who are in Christ become holy because Jesus obeyed God. When God looks at you now, He does not see your pride and disobedience. From now on, He sees Jesus' perfect humility and obedience given to you at your baptism.

From now on, we will live differently. Why? Jesus who died on the cross also rose from the dead to new life. In the same way, we who are in Christ Jesus have new life as well. God exalts us to live new. He gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us. It is the Holy Spirit working within us that changes our attitude to that of a humble servant and give us power to obey and do His will. And when you do become proud again, rebel against God, and do for yourself, it is the Holy Spirit who calls you to repentance and gives you forgiveness.

Lent is a time for our obedience to God to be renewed. How does that happen? We can't do it no matter how hard we try to do better. However, we can give an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to do His work in us. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to work in us and change us. If our obedience to God is to be renewed, then it means we must use the Scriptures more often - reading them at home, as well as listening to them with other Christians in church. In the Scriptures, we will find out what God really wants and doesn't want. Satan and the world will then not be able to fool us so easily.

In the Scriptures, we will also receive the power to obey God more and more. God's Word wills a sanctified life for us and God's Word always empowers what it wills. And when we fail to obey, God's Word is always there to apply the forgiveness and healing that we need.

Having "heard, read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested" the Scriptures, look for opportunities to obey God and do them. God's will for your life here at church - worshiping, giving, and serving - obey that. When you leave and go back to the world, there are people who have authority over us. God gave them that authority and He wants us to obey them. Children, obey your parents and teachers. That is obeying God and He is pleased when you do that. Adults, obey your bosses at work and the government. That is obeying God and He is pleased when you do that.

Obeying is not always easy, just like Jesus' obedience was not easy. Sometimes, obedience causes us pain and suffering, just like Jesus' obedience meant painful suffering for Him. Sometimes, we do not want to obey, just as Jesus did not want to have to obey and be crucified. But Jesus said, "Yet, let your will happen, not my will." May God help us to say the same: "God, let your will happen, not mine." And may God give us His Holy Spirit and His power to obey His will for our lives. Amen.