

## Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, April 27, 2025  
"Obeying God"

### Young at Heart Message

Imagine with me for a moment...

Imagine I am young – say 10 years old.

At 10, I'm curious about the world, and I explore that world with all my senses. I try new things, and I learn about the world by observing or experiencing the consequences of my actions.

Now, imagine I live on a farm with a beautiful chicken coop. I've been around this chicken coop my whole life, so it's not new to me.

But, what IS new to me is my discovery of this lighter.

Fire is fascinating, and I just discovered that I can create fire using this lighter. I'd like to play with it a little bit and see what happens when I ignite different things.

But, I also know that if I get *caught* playing with it, I'll get into trouble.

So, I decide to play with it in the chicken coop where no one will see me.

I pick up a piece of straw in the chicken coop and I put the lighter to it to see what happens.

I figure there's no real danger of doing this – after all, it's just one piece of straw.

But, when I put the flame to the end of the straw, I don't anticipate how quickly the flame will burn through that one small piece of straw.

It crawls quickly toward my fingers, and I get worried and drop the piece of straw.

But, it's still ignited, and now it's also lit the piece of straw next to it.

I'm not sure what to do, but I know I should probably cover it with something to put the fire out.

The only thing around is more straw, so I grab a handful and put it over the burning straw.

Whew! All I see now is smoke, so I breathe a sigh of relief that the fire is out.

I watch for a moment, but I notice the smoke isn't stopping, and then I notice a small flame.

OK, I must not have snuffed it out with enough straw. So I put a huge pile of straw over the small flame.

The fire seems to be snuffed out completely now – I don't see anymore smoke or flames. I watch it for a minute just to make sure.

All seems OK, so I breathe a sigh of relief, grab my lighter, and head back inside before anyone finds me.

About 10 minutes later, I hear my parents yelling that the chicken coop is on fire!

The adults in the room know that trying to snuff out a fire using flammable materials isn't going to get us very far.

But, a child may not know that – what seems obvious to us isn't always obvious to them.

Burying a fire with straw isn't going to be effective in putting out the fire. Burying it will only cause it to spread further.

## **The Message**

And this is where we find Peter and the Apostles today.

Multiple forces have been trying to bury Jesus and anyone associated with him.

But, the flame had already been lit, and trying to bury him was only causing more and more people to catch fire (metaphorically).

When I read this passage, I had to research what the Sanhedrin was.

According to my Google search, it can be defined in the following way:

*The Sanhedrin was a Jewish legislative and judicial assembly in ancient Israel, functioning at both local and central levels. It was a council of elders or a senate, with the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem holding the highest*

*authority. The term "Sanhedrin" itself means "council" or "sitting together" in Greek.*

This trial that the apostles are dealing with comes on the heels of their miraculous escape from prison.

You might be wondering why Peter and the apostles were in prison in the first place.

They got into trouble because of their healing miracles and their insistence that Jesus was the only name by which humankind could be saved.

However, if you were a Roman in the time of the apostles, you knew that Augustus Caesar was the sole saviour of the world.

Therefore, this new group of people going around saying that *Jesus* was actually the sole saviour of the world was seen as a threat to the Roman Empire.

From their perspective, Jesus was an imposter whose name should not be associated with the titles the emperor had justly earned.

However, as we know, there is a huge difference between the actions of Jesus and the actions of the emperor.

The Roman emperor would have exercised absolute power in order to maintain his status.

Jesus, however, sacrificed his power and status in the process of bringing salvation to everyone.

The Roman emperor abused power and used violence to claim the status of saviour.

Jesus, on the other hand, was crucified, which was an act of solidarity with the marginalized. This is what ultimately made Jesus saviour.

People had been encouraged, or perhaps even forced, to believe that the Roman emperor was their saviour, despite the fact that they were coerced into believing it.

So when Jesus came along and contradicted the emperor, he started a fire among people who were thirsty for change.

Thirsty people are like dry straw – once they catch fire, that fire spreads quickly and it is difficult to bury or snuff out.

By the time we see the apostles at this trial, the flames have spread to a point where they are essentially out of control.

There are multiple powers now trying to suppress the Jesus movement.

While on trial, Peter and the other apostles are reminded that they were explicitly told not to teach in Jesus' name.

Peter responds by saying “We must obey God rather than human beings!”

This line is heavy in a world where there are multiple power forces converging to try to stifle the teachings of Jesus.

And, it is a heavy line in every era after this, from the time of the apostles to now.

Why? Well, because power, money, authority, and control are motivating factors for many humans, including, often, those elected or appointed to lead.

Obedying God instead of obeying human beings can be quite difficult in any world where human beings lead other human beings, and in any world where those same human beings – the leaders and the led – are motivated by their own individualistic concerns.

Leaders are often motivated not by doing the best for the most people, but by doing the best for themselves, including whatever will allow them to stay in control.

And, the general population tends to be motivated by whatever is in *their* own best interest.

So, for example, I don't like green peppers. I would be perfectly happy to see legislation outlawing green peppers.

If I were a single-issue voter, and there was a candidate who was prepared to outlaw green peppers, I would vote for that candidate no matter what.

But, other people like green peppers. They add flavour to foods, they are healthy, and they are inexpensive.

If green peppers were outlawed, it would be good for me personally, but it wouldn't necessarily be good for everyone else.

Now of course, that's a silly example. But if we translate that to larger issues, we can see how people can very quickly lose sight of the big picture because all they can see is how they personally might be impacted.

So, when Peter says "We must obey God rather than human beings," we can quickly see how this might actually be much easier said than done.

When power structures and individual motivations are at play in our lives, we can easily lose sight of what God might want because of our personal motivations.

God may want people to have access to green peppers, but because I personally don't like them, I can easily lose sight of what God might want in lieu of my own desires.

Likewise, it can be difficult for me to see how God might want something for other people that I don't want for myself.

We can begin to see how obeying God can easily become quite difficult and complicated, especially when we are talking about a community or society where everyone has different perspectives and opinions.

And, often, people have different opinions while both maintaining that their opinion is what God wants!

So, how do we reconcile these things?

Well, it's not easy, but Peter does give us the "tip of the iceberg" answer. He points us to Jesus and his example, and the movement of the Holy Spirit among those who obey God.

I say this is just the "tip of the iceberg" because we can see how complicated it truly is.

But, we can start by looking just at our own lives, and we can lean on God to guide us in the small things so that we can get better at letting God lead for the bigger things.

If we are able to do this consistently in our own lives, it will become easier to see when others may be leading us astray (or when others may be working from their own selfish motivations rather than wondering *with* God what the answer might be).

If we are able to learn from the work Jesus did while he was on earth and wonder *with* God how Jesus' example might be speaking to us in our own lives, we may begin to learn how to notice God's movement in more of our day-to-day life.

As my Spiritual Director likes to remind me: wisdom is *not* knowing *more*; wisdom is knowing *with* more of yourself.

May we allow the flame of Jesus' life and teachings to ignite in us a spirit of wonder and joy.

May we lean into knowing God *with* more of ourselves, and may we have the wisdom to know when we might be straying from God's path.

Amen.

Loving God, we like to think that life is simple, and that we have all the answers to complicated questions and differences of opinion. Help us to listen for Your guiding voice. Help us to use Jesus as an example in our own lives when we aren't sure what the right answer might be to the difficult questions. Walk with us as we journey together and continue to navigate a complicated world, reminding us over and over again that we are called to love and care for others without judgement. Amen.