

## Pastor Jamie's Sermon

**Good Shepherd Church, May 4, 2025**  
**“Obeying God, Once Again”**

### The Message

This week's scripture readings follow on the heels of last week's scripture, in which Peter responds to the accusations of the jury he had to answer to by saying, “We must obey God rather than human beings!”

Last week, I talked about the challenges to obeying God in a world where multiple power forces converge to try to stifle the teachings of Jesus.

And of course, those challenges existed in the time of the disciples, and they still exist now.

I mentioned that the challenge is that many humans are motivated by power, authority, money, and control. And, inevitably, the humans who end up in leadership roles are not usually an exception to this.

I want to remind us all of the example I gave last week for why obeying God is so difficult before we move into talking about this week's scriptures.

Last week, I said the following:

*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.*

We talked last week about how this example is silly, of course, but it is how many people think about much bigger issues.

Peter, for example, was a devoted follower of Jesus, and if we could ask him, I think he would probably say that he was doing his best to “obey God.”

But, it is no secret that Peter struggled to trust Jesus and obey him completely.

Peter had a *lot* of questions and doubts. And I appreciate that about Peter because he helps many people to feel better about the fact that they have a lot of questions, too.

Peter also, as we just heard through Lent and Easter, denied Jesus three times. So, despite his very best efforts to obey and trust Jesus, he still failed when it mattered most.

Today, we see Jesus offer Peter grace despite his failures. And I appreciate that, too, because Peter receives from Jesus the grace that we *all* need from time to time.

Perhaps the more interesting passage from today's readings is the passage about Saul.

Saul, as we know, becomes the incredibly devoted Paul who wrote many letters to various communities which have been recorded in the Bible.

But in today's passage from Acts, we see a totally different Paul. We see him before he becomes Paul.

Before his encounter with the risen Jesus, Saul is devoted to fairly aggressively threatening and persecuting Jesus's disciples.

The passage uses the phrase "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples."

That's not such a great look, admittedly.

Saul believes so strongly in his cause that he was blinded by rage.

Interestingly, what he is really fighting for is his own spiritual cause. He's fighting to preserve the Jewish laws and customs, and he's fighting against the idea that Jesus was the Messiah.

If we go back to my green pepper statement for the sake of discussion, it would be like me going out publicly and trying to ban green peppers.

If I believed that I was doing God's work by trying to get green peppers banned, and there were other people out there trying to make green peppers required with every meal because God told them so, we'd be in a similar situation to Saul.

So, how do I know if I'm right, or they are right?

Unfortunately, for many people, including Saul, it might take a really big “sign” to change the mind of someone who believes so passionately about something.

Saul got a visit from the resurrected Jesus.

*That’s* a pretty big sign.

But most of the rest of us don’t get those kinds of signs.

For me, I might need to personally know someone who can explain to me how banning green peppers might affect them personally.

Maybe my sister would need to tell me that green peppers are the only peppers she can eat.

Banning them would mean that she wouldn’t get to enjoy the flavour that peppers can add to her food because she can only eat green peppers.

The point here is this: Peter and Saul both demonstrate for us this notion that obeying God can be difficult and complex.

And, sometimes, we believe so strongly that we are right about something that it takes a very big “sign” to help us realize we may not be right, or that we may need to *evolve* our thinking.

Or, at the very least, to help us realize that other people might have different opinions and very good reasons for feeling differently than we do.

Jesus didn’t reprimand Saul. Jesus offered him an olive branch and let Saul make his own choice.

Saul could have chosen to continue his persecution. He could have chosen not to believe his eyes and his ears.

Many people make that choice because it is easier than confronting their possible biases.

But, Saul chose to obey. Saul chose to trust. And, he ended up changing his mind. Or, more accurately, he ended up evolving his thinking.

Instead of feeling ashamed for defending what he thought was what God wanted, Saul opened his mind and heart to another possibility.

He welcomed the change, and recognized that he didn't know what he didn't know. He received the proof he needed that prompted him to walk a different path.

It is the case for us, too, that God confronts us in ways that might make us uncomfortable initially.

I am sure that Saul was thinking "oh, crud. I was wrong." He was probably trying to figure out every way possible to ignore this new information – this proof.

I am sure he was uncomfortable. But he opened himself up to the possibility that he was wrong.

And we must sometimes do the same.

I will admit... I might be wrong about banning green peppers. It might not be as black and white, or as "all or nothing" as I thought it should be.

So, may we all consider opening ourselves to new possibilities and ways of thinking.

We all have our "green pepper" issues. And we all struggle sometimes to understand the perspective of other people.

May we consider opening our eyes to the ways in which God might speak to us – perhaps through a big "sign," but more likely through our relationships with other people and through listening to the lived experiences of others.

May we listen for God, wonder with God, and invite God to open our hearts to a better understanding of the world and of those around us who are different than we are.

May we work to trust God and the ways that God works in our own lives. Amen.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we do not always know if we are obeying and trusting in you, or in our own wants and desires. Forgive us when we stray from your path, and help lovingly guide us back when we wander.

Help us to feel your presence in our lives and to discern what it is you want from us in the ways we will understand. This may look different for each one of us, but we pray that with your guidance, we will be able to walk the path you wish us to walk. In your loving name we pray. Amen.