

## He Is Risen Indeed-Now What?

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**Acts 5:29-32** Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead -- whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Can it really be that **Easter** was just a week ago? All those activities during Holy Week seem like a long time ago already: Palm Sunday and Confirmation, worship on Maundy Thursday, the Tenebrae service on Good Friday, and the two celebrations of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. We had a packed house last week, as we do every Easter, which was thrilling. I heard a lot of comments about how meaningful and beautiful the services were. People spoke of them with enthusiasm and emotion. It was indeed a festival time, a time when you really feel good about being a Christian. It was a time of true worship and praise to God, and all the glory of the services belongs to Him.

**But, now what?** Do we lay aside that "spiritual high" and fervor until Christmas? Many do. They take the attitude that they need a break, they need some rest, so Church and its activities get pushed aside for a while. Just last week inside these walls we thundered the words **I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES. HE IS RISEN..HE IS RISEN INDEED. ALLELUIA!** It something we know with our heads and believe with our hearts. **But now what**--does that make any difference? Does your life change as a result of that knowledge and faith?

It certainly did for the **disciples** of Jesus. They were transformed from timid followers into mighty messengers. And this is perhaps most evident in the life of Peter. In the text for today, we find him taking a bold stand for his Savior through the power of the Holy Spirit. He had been imprisoned for preaching Christ crucified and risen again. An angel freed him and the other apostles, and the next morning they were right back there preaching again. It hardly seems possible that this is the same fellow who cursed and said "I don't know the man!" on Good Friday. But there he is, preaching with a zeal and fervor that cannot be stopped. The Jewish authorities had Peter and John brought in again, and asked them why they persisted. Peter's reply? **We must obey god rather than men.**

The Junior Confirmation class always picks up on this passage. I tell them that there is a time that they can disobey their parents and get away with it, and naturally their ears perk up. They

want to know more about this. The answer is in this verse: if your parents, or anyone in authority tells you to go against God, then the choice is obvious: ***We must obey god rather than men.***

This all sounds very noble, and indeed it can be. When we think of this verse, we usually remember **Peter's** mighty stand for Christ. We think of **Paul** professing his faith before kings and also being jailed for it. We think of **Luther** and his "HERE I STAND, I CANNOT DO OTHERWISE." There were many men of faith in England through the years who literally lost their heads for refusing to yield to the earthly king at the expense of obedience to the King of Kings. There are people still today being killed for refusing to deny Christ. These are indeed admirable examples of obeying God rather than men.

However, this passage is not limited to grand public displays. It should also be true for your everyday living. But it is difficult it is to do on a daily, individual level. Friends encourage you to do something you know is wrong or unethical, and you find it hard to say NO. Maybe someone told you a way to fill out your **tax forms** to hide some of your income from Uncle Sam. They say, "Everyone else is doing it." Peer pressure is powerful, and all too often we give in to it.

And I thought of another way that you should look at this passage. When it says ***We must obey god rather than men,*** that means all men, including yourself. All too often you want to be your own master. "**Nobody's gonna tell me what to do.**" And the human mind has the amazing capability to justify that even though something is wrong for everyone else, it is acceptable if I do it. All of you have done that. So have I. But if something is wrong, it is wrong, period! God has set the standards for us in His Word, and it is pretty clear. The problem is, we would rather obey ourselves than God.

As a result of this kind of rebellious behavior, when we stop to examine our lives, we feel guilty. We know that we have fallen short of the ideal, that we have not obeyed God, and we feel ashamed. It is at this point that the message of the **cross and the empty tomb** needs to be recalled. Our Father in heaven knew that we are sin-filled people, that we need a means of rescue, and sent Jesus to take care of us. The Sinless Lamb of God carried all of your sins to the cross, died with them there, and rose again that you might be assured of forgiveness and victory. **HE IS RISEN. BECAUSE HE LIVES, YOU WILL LIVE ALSO.**

So again I ask the question: He is risen indeed--**now what?** A proper understanding of Easter, an understanding that flows from faith, means that you want to join Peter in affirming ***We must obey God rather than men.*** Knowing that Christ is Risen, that you are forgiven, redeemed and restored, leads you to conform your life to God's desire for you. That is true whether we are talking about doing your best in the most mundane of chores or standing up publicly for what you know is right. Your life, in the bright and shining light of the Resurrection of Jesus, will be one of willing service and obedience to God.

In our efforts to be obedient to Christ, we should certainly keep in mind His Great Commission, charging us with the task of being His witnesses. That was the context in which Peter spoke in today's text: ***we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.*** Being obedient to God rather than men also means, then, that we will share the Gospel with those around us. That is the primary function of the church. That is the job of this congregation. And that is the job of every person in this congregation. What are you doing to be obedient to the call of your God? How will you proclaim the life and salvation offered through Jesus Christ to the people in your world? Next week, my message will give you an outline I came across recently entitled "A Plan for Sharing your Faith." There will be specific suggestions for you to follow as you strive to live as a witness of the resurrection.

Until then, this week I want you to consider how you can display obedience to God while you are out there "in the trenches." What can you do in your day to day living that will show your willingness to conform to God's Will? **What can you do to show those around you that Easter does make a difference?** As a believer, as a disciple of Jesus, you want to obey God in response to the free gift of forgiveness He has given. Knowing that Jesus rose from the dead in order that you might also rise to eternal life, makes you want to obey God, it makes you want to please Him. So how will you do that this week?

He is risen--now what? It should make a difference in the way you react to that frazzled mom in the grocery store whose kid won't stop screaming. It should change the way you reply when you come home and find your spouse irritable. It should influence the way you console a depressed co-worker. Share your Savior in all of your actions. Speak of the forgiveness and salvation that is a certainty in your life. He is risen! because he lives, you will live also. Knowing this should make you single-minded in your efforts to OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN.