

Acts 5:29-42

Back in the days before spankings were called child abuse, children who were disciplined had expressions describing this rather painful event. “My dad beat the tar out of me!” or “My father said he was going to beat the pants off of me!” Sometimes a father might even tell his unruly son, “I’m going to beat the devil out of you!” In our text for today a similar, yet very different expression, could have been spoken after the Apostles received a severe beating from the hands of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. They might have told the believers upon their return, “They tried to beat Jesus out of us!”

Peter and the others were arrested for preaching in the name of Jesus. “*We must obey God rather than men,*” they told the high priest. After beating them, they told the Apostles to stop preaching in Jesus’ name. Did they stop? Did they manage to beat Jesus out of them? If they had, you and I would not be Christians today. Peter and the other Apostles did not even flinch. They picked right up where they left off. They kept boldly preaching in the name of the Risen Lord Jesus day after day.

I think we can safely assume that very many Christians were severely beaten last week. They had the Risen Lord Jesus beaten out of them. Why else would church attendance across our land drop so drastically from Easter until today? In actuality, however, I realize that the lack of pain and suffering, more than the presence of it, drives Jesus out of the heart. I pity the poor Christian who has life so good, with no troubles, no hardships, no sorrow, that he never learns what faith really is. St. Peter, in our Epistle for today, says that our trials reveal the genuineness of our faith. Just as gold is tested by fire, so Christians must be tested by trials if we are to remain Christians.

This “trial by fire” will find us right where we live with the words of Peter and the other Apostles, “*We must obey God rather than men.*” To stick to these words, to hold to them and practice them results in abuse from the world. Just as the Apostles were severely beaten, so are those today who “*obey God rather than men.*” A bakery in New Mexico was recently driven out of business because the owner politely, yet firmly, declined to make a wedding cake for a gay couple. This abuse also happened when a wedding photographer declined for the same reason. Scientists have lost their jobs because they refused to accept the Theory of Evolution as factual. Americans who legally stand up for the rights of unborn babies, calling abortion what it is--murder--are ridiculed and even attacked. All this abuse is not isolated. It is becoming the norm throughout our country. Such severe beatings that the Apostles received, and that many are receiving today, may not have come into your life...yet. But God’s Word tells it like it is. All who strive to obey God rather than men will suffer abuse in one way or another.

So what do we do? We turn Peter’s words around and often strive to please men rather than God. Some obey their boss even though their boss always stands in the way of allowing them to worship. Some obey their children’s coaches who hold practices and games when God calls us to be in His House. Do we obey the voice of the public and refuse to call homosexuality sinful? Do we obey the world by remaining silent when Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are challenged and denied? In every area of life we are tempted to obey men rather than God. We are such men pleasers, such obeyers of men that we have forgotten that we belong to God first.

Something must change. We must. We must repent. Last Sunday we celebrated our Lord’s resurrection. Jesus lives! What of it? If Easter does not change us, then we have no right to call ourselves people of God. If we can die with Christ in our baptism, and there rise with Him, yet live to obey men rather than God, then the Spirit of the Risen Christ no longer lives within us. Am I now

preaching to please men? If I was, my preaching would disobey God. We all, myself included, need to hear the harsh rebuke of the Law. We all need to change. We all need to repent.

The good news for you is that Jesus did not live to obey men. He lived and died to obey God. Are Christians suffering today? Jesus suffered more because He always obeyed God rather than men. Were the Apostles beaten? Jesus was beaten more because He always obeyed God rather than men. Is life difficult for you? For Jesus it was the most difficult of all. Jesus was abused, beaten, ridiculed, and crucified--receiving all this as punishment for sin because He obeyed God rather than men for you, so that God now receives you as sons and daughters in Christ. Any abuse, any suffering, hardship, or sorrow that comes to you does not come as punishment from God no matter how much we deserve it. It comes only as discipline, as testing, as trial by fire to drop you to your knees in prayer, to lead you ever closer to Jesus.

Jesus pleased His Father in heaven by suffering what our sins deserve. Jesus pleased His Father by accepting the penalty that you and I have earned for being such pleasers of men. Jesus always refused to obey men rather than God. The Chief Priests and Pharisees were against everything He did and taught, but Jesus never gave in to them. Pilate urged Him to speak in His own defense, but Jesus refused, and this is why His Father in heaven was well-pleased with Him--because He obeyed His Father's will and became guilty for your sake and mine. If Jesus had been a men-pleaser, all would be lost for us. No forgiveness, no life, no salvation, no heaven. He was not. Jesus pleased God with all He did. Jesus obeyed His Father in all things. And so you have a forgiving God. God is pleased with you because of Jesus. God looks with favor upon you who through Holy Baptism are united to Christ. God forgives you. You and I, who are such men-pleasers, God forgives because of Jesus.

Knowing all this, believing all this, can we still live to obey men rather than God? Can we go back to our old habits, our old way of life? Not if the Spirit of the Risen Christ lives in us. Jesus, who now lives in you, lives through you to please God rather than men. It's not that you and I will start obeying God now. It's Jesus, who always obeys His Father in heaven, who lives in your heart and life. He obeys God in your words and actions. When you obey God rather than men, it's not you and I doing it; it's Jesus doing it through us. So when abuse comes, my friend, when trials by fire come for obeying God rather than men, do not fear, do not be anxious. Jesus endured. And so will you because He who suffered, died, and rose again, now lives within you. Amen.