

Joy-Filled Obedience

Preached: 3/7/2021; 4th Sunday in Lent – Germantown;

Opening Prayer

Scripture

Ephesians 5:1-10

Ephesians 5:1-10 (NIV)

5 ¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord.

Message

Joy Filled Obedience

For the past few weeks we have been talking about the phrase “**God Loves You**”. Sometimes we say things or we repeat them so often that we don't really appreciate the significance of what these words mean. I think that is true of this little phrase. I have mentioned that in my years as a pastor, I have encountered people who say that phrase, but in my opinion, they do not live as if they actually believe that. When we understand that God loves us, we understand that we now live in a new relationship with God. He is our loving Father. We are His beloved child. We are not just acquaintances of God. Through our faith in Jesus, we have been made His child. He has adopted us. We are His child at the same level as Jesus. Jesus is our brother. When we fully understand this new relationship that is going to affect the way we think and believe. We have a new sense of value and worth. Being God's child is your **new identity**. Last week I talked about the significance of God's forgiveness. When we understand that God loves us, and that He offers to us the free gift of forgiveness, we are set free from a guilty conscience and feelings of shame. When people live with a sense of guilt and shame, they may do things that cause pain for themselves or others. They may pursue relationships, or engage in behavior or habits to cover up those painful feelings. But now, all of our sins have been removed from our lives and will never be brought up again. We are completely pardoned and forgiven. So, when we fully grasp the truth that God loves us, it will have a significant impact on the way we feel about ourselves. It will have an impact on the way we interact with God. It will have an impact on our spirituality. It will impact the way we interact with others.

In this series of studies, I have been trying to complete the phrase ***If it is true that God loves me, then.....***” we will demonstrate that we believe that statement in certain ways.

- **If it is true that God loves me, then I believe that God is my Father, and I am His child.** I will think, feel, live my daily life as a child of the holy Father in heaven. I have a new identity
- **If it is true that God loves me, then I believe that He has completely forgiven me for all my sin.** I will no longer live my life thinking that God is mad at me and is out to get me.

Now today, I want to add a new “**If...Then**” statement:

- **If it is true that God loves me, then my life will be characterized by **Joy-Filled Obedience**.**

I believe that this passage of Scripture that I read today, provides us with the correct motive for living a life of obedience.

Some people think that the Christian life is nothing more than a bunch of rules and laws. There is the 10 commandments and all those other laws and rules found in the Bible. Many people conclude that if you want to be a Christian, you have to follow all the rules. If you want to please God you have to follow the rules. Obedience is a way of measuring whether they are a Christian or not. For people like that, living for God, is hard and difficult. The Christian life is a burden.

They may use this passage in Ephesians to prove their point. They read starting at verse 3 and conclude God's way is hard. God is a mean God who just doesn't want us to have any fun:

- **No sexual immorality**
- **Don't be greedy – Don't prioritize riches**
- **No cussing**
- **No repeating dirty jokes**
- **Living for God 24/7**

All that some people see in this passage is just a list of "do's and don'ts". It is true that obedience is a significant word in the Bible. The word "Obey" is used over 200 times in the Bible. Obedience appears over 35 times. So it is an important word. In the Bible, the supreme test of faith in God is obedience. We see that in the lives of men like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, It was an important principle for God's people Israel. Deuteronomy 8:1 says: ***Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase.*** 8:6 says: ***Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and revering Him.*** And there are many other references that teach us that obedience is a big deal. Doing what God wants and avoiding what displeases Him must be our priority.

There can be different motivations for obedience. For some, the motivation to obey God's commands is negative. Someone might obey just to avoid bad consequences. They obey in order to avoid punishment. When someone's motivation for obedience is negative, obedience is usually done grudgingly. It is a burden. It does not bring joy or delight to our spirit. We would rather not do what we are being asked or commanded to do. But we don't want to experience the consequences. So we do what we are told. We obey.

But there is another way to understanding the importance of obeying God or doing what pleases Him. We can understand the importance of following God's teachings from a positive point of view. And it has to do with understanding this phrase, **God Loves Me.**

5¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Paul says that our living must be motivated not by fear, but by God's love. In verse 1 Paul reminds us of our little phrase we have been thinking about – **God Loves You.** He says we are God's **dearly loved** children. And that is not just a nice phrase that Paul is throwing in here – God loves you. We know that God's love for us is a reality. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has put His love into action, He has sacrificed for us. Jesus gave Himself up as a sacrifice for us. Paul says that the sacrifice of Christ was like a "Fragrant Offering" to God. In the Old Testament, burning incense was a part of worship. Offering incense symbolized the love and prayers of God's people, rising to God's presence. The sweet, fragrant smell of the incense was pleasing to God. Christ's sacrifice for sinners was pleasing to God.

Paul says then that as we understand how deeply God loves us, our living should be an expression of our love for Him. "**Follow God's example**". Some translations state it like this: **Be imitators of God and walk in the way of Love.** Living for God, or obedience to God's word is no longer a drudgery for the person who understands that they are Loved by God. Obedience now becomes an expression of our thanks to God, an expression of our Joy because of all that God has done for us. He concludes this section by reminding us that God has brought us **out of darkness and into His light.** We now live our lives as children of light. We **find out what pleases the Lord** and we do that. (Vs. 8-10). Not because **WE HAVE TO**, but because **WE WANT**

TO. In John 14:23 Jesus says ***If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching.***” Obedience is offered to God as an expression of our love for Him. The point that I made in the sermon 2 weeks ago was that we have been Adopted by a Loving and Holy God. Obedience or living for God is a way of living out our adoption as His sons and daughters.

So once again I declare to you **God Loves You!** You are His dearly loved Child. He has gone to great lengths to bring you into His family. Let His love for you become your motivation for living for Him. May your life be characterized by **Joy-filled Obedience.**

Prayer and Blessing (St. Patrick's Lorica)

The Lorica of Saint Patrick (Breastplate Prayer)

*I arise today through God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to see before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to secure me –
 *against snares of devils,
 against temptations and vices,
 against inclinations of nature,
 against everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and anear, alone and in a crowd...**

*Christ, be with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ where I lie,
Christ where I sit,
Christ where I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Christ. May your salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.