



## **SERMONS FOR ADVENT**

Sermon Notes

***On the Incarnation: the Obedience of the Son***

**Philippians 2:5-11**

**December 16, 2012**

<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

- On Friday morning at 9:40 a.m., in the small town of Newton, Connecticut, a man entered into Sandy Hook Elementary and began opening fire. As of yesterday, 28 people were confirmed dead, 20 of which were children.
- This type of horror and tragedy is something that is difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend. Why would someone do this? How are the victim's families coping. How are they going to get through this? What if this occurred here? How could it have been prevented?
- All of these questions, and more, are being asked by investigators, the media, and the American people. I know for me, personally, I have done my best to not think about it, and avoid news coverage as much as I can over this weekend. But, tragically, the families of the victims do not have that luxury.
  - Most certainly, this type of tragedy as puts life into perspective as well. What are the things that *really* matter, and where should we truly place our priorities?

- As I have contemplated these questions, and as I prepared for this morning, I also have thought: What bearing does the Christian faith have on a tragedy like what we have heard in Connecticut? How would you or I respond to the individuals affected?
- And in the context of the Incarnation of Christ, the topic we have been examining for the past couple of weeks, what is the message that would give comfort and hope to these families?
  - When the angel appeared to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem, he proclaimed, **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”**
- So the question is: what is this good news of great joy? Is it truly *good enough* to bring comfort and even joy in the midst of such a tragedy as occurred in Newton, Connecticut?
  - As I have thought about all of these things, the question came to my mind, “As a parent, if I had only one day left with my children, what would my message to them be?” As a pastor and teacher, I ask the same question.
  - I suppose another way of looking at this is: **HOW DOES THE GOSPEL BRING COMFORT AND HOPE AND JOY?**
- And that is what I want to focus on this morning. I believe the answer can be summed up in one word: **Obedience**.
  - But this is not the type of obedience that most people think of. That is, I am not speaking of *our* obedience, but rather, the obedience of Christ.
  - **The truth of Christ’s obedience gets to the heart of the Gospel message.**
  - **I can honestly say that if there was one message, one core truth, one guiding biblical principle by which my entire life and ministry would be defined, I believe this would be it – that Christ is our obedience and our righteousness.**
- Over the past few weeks, we have been examining the truth of Christ’s Incarnation and its impact on our lives today.
- And this morning, we turn to the obedience of Christ. As the Apostle Paul states:

<sup>8</sup> *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*      Philippians 2:8

- I. The Source of Obedience**
- II. The Motivation for Obedience**
- III. The Cost of Obedience**
- IV. The Joy of Obedience**

**I. The Source of Obedience**

- Before we can understand the source of Christian obedience, we must first ask ourselves, “**What is it that God expects from us?**”
- If we look to the testimony of Scripture [alone], we soon realize that it paints a fairly clear picture. **God demands perfection.**

Matthew 5:48: “<sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

James 2:10: “<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

- God’s holiness and perfection are absolute, and so are His standards and requirements. His absolute holiness demands a perfect creation.
  - To put it a little more clearly: **God demands perfect righteousness in us in thought, word, and deed.**
  - Yet, herein lies the great dilemma: none of us can achieve this. In fact, we are all born sinful.
- Therefore, if we are going to satisfy God’s impossible demands, we must look outside ourselves for hope.
- In one of the great passages of Scripture, found in Genesis 22, Abraham takes Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him, just as God commanded. As they approached Mount Moriah (the future place of Jerusalem), we read:

“<sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. <sup>7</sup> And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.” Genesis 22:6

- In this beautiful passage that so clearly foreshadows the death of Christ on the cross nearly 2,000 years before our Lord is even born in Bethlehem, Abraham makes a statement regarding our Messiah: **God will provide for Himself.**

- **In other words, the acceptable sacrifice for God had to come *from* God. And this sacrifice had to be not only perfect, but righteous – God’s absolute standard.**
- What does this mean that God’s sacrifice had to be both perfect and righteous?
  - I like to say that perfection is something that is a rather “passive” act whereby the “perfect” individual “keeps his nose clean” and does not do anything wrongly.
  - However, righteousness is something wholly different. In other words, righteousness involves the active fulfillment of the Law. It does not involve “doing nothing wrongly” but rather “doing everything rightly.” It is not passive, but is active.
  - **And this is why the Father sent the Son**, and this is precisely why the work of Christ is so incredible. He fulfilled the Law and satisfied its demand, thus living a life of perfect obedience and perfect righteousness.
- Therefore, in His life, Christ actively fulfilled every aspect and demand of the Law and, consequently, when He offered Himself up to God the Father, He was the only true and acceptable sacrifice in the eyes of God.

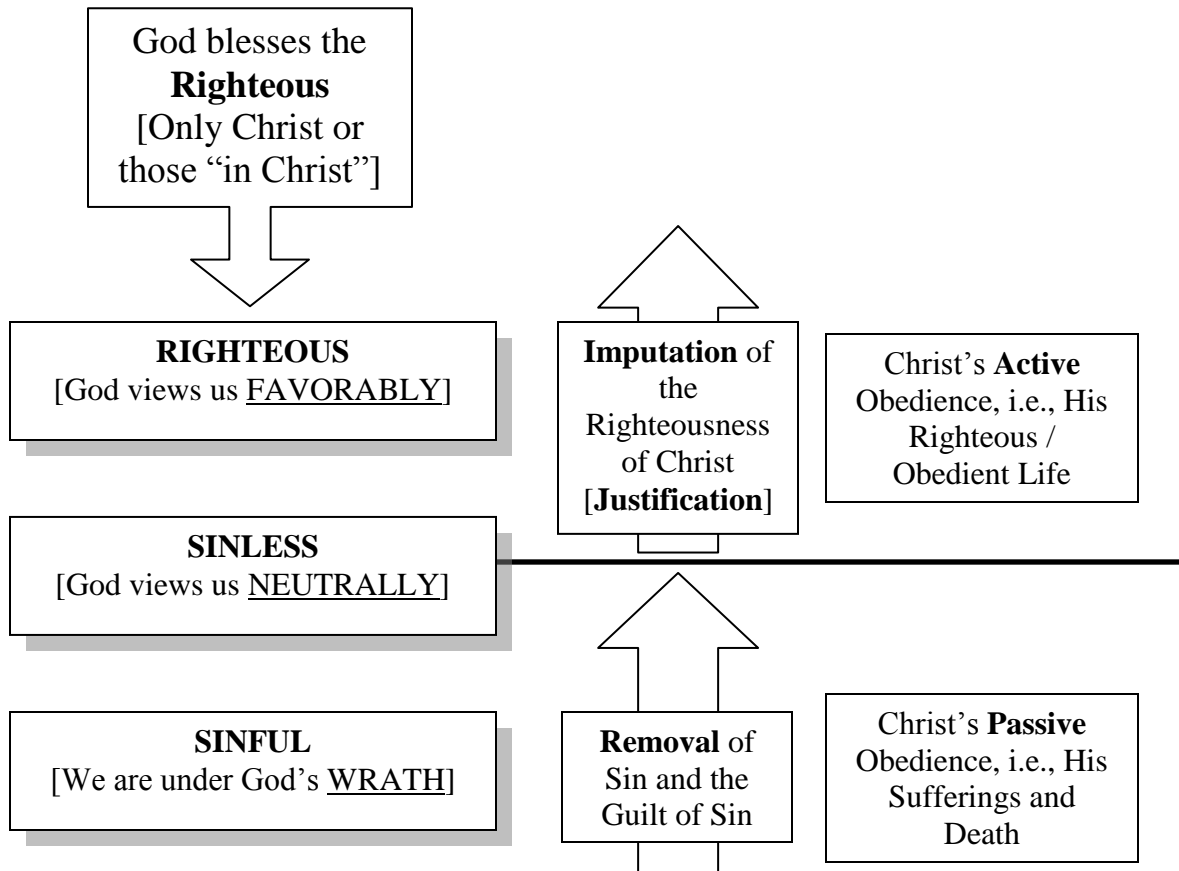
Hebrews 9:14: “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

- **Therefore, because of His righteous life, and death on our behalf and in our place, Christ became our perfect substitute.**
  - And as our perfect substitute, Christ became our righteousness. That is, our sin and guilt were imputed to Christ on the cross, and God judged Him for our sins. Yet, in this same exchange, God imputed us with the righteousness of Christ – something much more than mere forgiveness of sins.

The great twentieth century Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof, correctly writes: **“If Christ had merely obeyed the law and had not also paid the penalty, He would not have won a title to eternal life for sinners; and if He had merely paid the penalty, without meeting the original demands of the law, He would have left man in the position of Adam before the fall, still confronted with the task of obtaining eternal life in the way of obedience.”** *Systematic Theology*, pp. 380-381

- But, praise be to God that the Incarnate Christ did both: He actively, purposefully and intentionally obeyed and fulfilled the Law, and He also paid the full penalty for our sins.

- Consequently, not only have our sins been forgiven [because of Christ’s death], but we receive the righteousness of Christ [because of the entirety of His obedient life]. And because of this, God does not look at us “neutrally” as though we never sinned, but He views us “righteously” as though we did everything rightly and perfectly obeyed God’s Law.
- **Therefore, God does not view us “neutrally” but with His infinite favor.**



- Therefore, because Christ obeyed the Law perfectly, we turn to Him for our obedience.
- To put it more clearly, Christ is not merely the *source* of our obedience, He **is** our obedience.

**Philippians 3:9**

“and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,”

**Romans 4:5**

“But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,”

**Romans 10:4**

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

○ **Therefore, we are not simply declared by God to be “not guilty,” we are declared righteous, for we are in Christ. And because of this, God blesses us as He does Christ.**

○ **We must turn and cling to Christ for our obedience, knowing that apart from Him, we are condemned.**

**II. The Motivation of Obedience**

○ So, if Christ is our obedience, then why should we obey? Can't we simply do whatever we want and everything will just be fine?

○ The reason these questions are so important is because it cuts to the core of our hearts.

○ In every human relationship that we have, there is always at least a hint of self-centeredness to which we cling.

○ For example, even children who love their parents dearly attempt to manipulate them at times. In other words, children know that obedience to their parents (even if it is not genuinely from the heart) will yield rewards.

○ Even within the best marriages, we subtly manipulate others to get our ways.

○ Sadly, we take this type of self-preservation and manipulation into our relationship with God.

○ **We seek to obey Him in order to get the blessings we seek. We approach our relationship with God formulaically. In other words, we believe if we do “x” then we will get “y.”**

○ **We all often seek the blessing rather than the Blessor. So, we tell ourselves, if we pray persistently enough for something, He will give it to us.**

○ **In other words, we live lives that are more interested in what God can do for us than seeking God for who He is.**

- And so the question remains, **Why do we seek to obey God?**
- I believe, biblically, there are at least two reasons why we do.

- **First of all, we seek to obey God, because it is in our NEW nature.**

Ezekiel 36:26-27: “<sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

- When we are united with Christ through faith in Him, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, our affections are turned towards Him. We actually desire to obey God, because He has graciously changed our nature.
- **The second reason we seek to obey God is related to the first. We seek to obey Him because we love Him.**

John 14:15: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

- 
- Now, it is certainly worth asking the question “Is it ok to desire the blessings of God?”
  - The answer to this question is **absolutely**. It is not only ok to desire the blessings of God, but we *should* seek the blessings of God.
  - Yet, we must understand that all lasting and true blessings are to be found **in Christ alone**.
  - Therefore, there is no true peace, no true joy, and no true comfort apart from Christ.

THERE IS A REASON WHY THE APOSTLE PAUL USES THE EXPRESSION “IN CHRIST” (OR SOMETHING SIMILAR, SUCH AS “IN HIM”) 150 TIMES IN HIS 13 EPISTLES!

- **Therefore, as we seek Christ and cling to Him as our righteousness, we enjoy the full blessings of God – blessings that transcend our temporary lives.**
-

- This reality also brings us another question: What is the measure of the effective Christian life? If I were to ask you, “How do you know you are living a ‘successful’ Christian life?” What would you say?
- This is a difficult question, as it, once again gets to the heart of the Gospel.

- 
- As we contemplate this question, I cannot help but think of the Houston Texans football team. This year, they are 11-2, putting them in 1<sup>st</sup> Place in the AFC South. Now, when it comes to professional sports, no other metric truly matters other than wins and losses. In other words, statistics such as rushing and passing yards mean nothing if they do not translate into wins and losses.
    - The same thing is true in so many other areas of our lives. In business, the metric is profit and loss. In politics, success is essentially defined by elections.
    - So what about the Christian life? Is tied to financial stability? Maybe not completely, but perhaps a small bit?
    - As Christian parents, is our success defined by how our children act?
    - As a pastor, is my success defined by the size of the congregation?
    - Is our success as evangelists defined by how many we “lead to the Lord?”
    - On the flip-side, what happens when things go horribly wrong, as they did in Connecticut this week? Was there something these people did to welcome God’s judgment? Are we immune to this type of horror if we will simply obey God and do what He says better than they did?
    - Each these questions get to the heart of the Gospel.
  - I believe, biblically, the message is clear: the mark of the “good” Christian life cannot be measured by the world’s standards.
  - Rather, the “good” Christian life is measured by a question: What is your affection for Christ? Do you trust in His obedience as being sufficient for you? Do you look to His merits? Do you find your forgiveness in Him alone?
  - **Or, are you still trying to find your righteousness and your identity in what you do rather than what He has done?**
  - These are the questions we must ask ourselves.



### III. The Cost of Obedience

- And this brings us to the cost of obedience.
- Obedience to Christ, we must understand and realize, will always come at a cost, and our Lord reminds us to “count the cost.”
- The first aspect of the cost of obedience is one that we rarely speak of: **a death to self.**
  - I believe few, if any, of us fully realize the degree to which we all rely on ourselves and our own good works to be a measure of our “Christian success.”
  - We may say we trust in Christ’s obedience, but we often do not.
  - Our identities in this world center around “what we do” rather than who we are in Christ.
  - And in an age of Facebook and Twitter, this reality has become all the more apparent. We seek approval from others, and when we do not get it, we will attempt to move heaven and earth to demonstrate just how Godly and holy we are.
  - I believe this is the first cost of true Christian obedience – that we “cease striving” to win the approval of man, for this only leads to death.
  - In fact, this approval-seeking actually reveals our fear of man (fear of man’s rejection) rather than our fear of God. It reveals, sadly, an idolatrous heart.
  - Freedom, then, will only come through the cross, and dying to ourselves and our slavery to the approval of man.
  - And if anyone thinks this is an easy task, he is only deceiving himself.
- The second truth regarding the cost of obedience is that it will lead down a road that is counter to this world.
  - Obedience to Christ means to follow the path He has already paved.
  - It will mean that we will be identified with Christ, and therefore will suffer with Him.

- Christ even promises this in John 16:33: “<sup>33</sup> I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”
- Addressing the Philippian church, Paul says, “<sup>27</sup> Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”
- So what is the life “worthy of the Gospel?”
  - According to Paul, it appears to be one that is committed to following Christ and not fearing man.
  - It also means suffering for the gospel.

#### IV. Obedience Leads to Joy

- Finally, we find that obedience actually leads to joy, even though it comes at a cost.
- The writer of Hebrews states:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”  
Hebrews 12:1-2

- Before the writer speaks of “enduring the cross” He describes “the joy that was set before Him.”
- So, what was that joy? It appears clear that it was the union He would once again share with His Father.
- This is the joy we should pray for – union with our Savior.
- Are our affections on Him? Is He the source of our joy? Through the difficult times in life, do we cling to Him for our joy and comfort? Is He alone our obedience, or do we seek to generate it ourselves? Is He alone our true sufficiency? May we pray that He would be.