

OBEYING GOD NOT MAN Transcript

By Dr. Ron Jones

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Well, we are in a study of the book of Acts. And I don't know about you, but I've really enjoyed this study. I've enjoyed going back 2000 years ago to remind myself and all of us as to how it all started. Sometimes it's hard to get a sense of where we are today as the church without going back to learn again and refresh our memory as to how it all started. And, boy, did it start with a bang, didn't it? Acts 2, Peter preaches his first sermon. The Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost, and 3,000 people come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Two chapters later Peter preaches his second sermon, and 5,000 more people come to faith in Jesus Christ. Kind of reminds me a little bit of the horse Justify yesterday at the Belmont Stakes. I don't know...I'm not a horse racing guy. I don't gamble, all of that. But I love a good sporting event, and especially when a Triple Crown is about to be won. And beautiful thoroughbred animals, these horses they are. Well, here is Justify. He'd won the Kentucky Derby. He won the Preakness, and now the Belmont Stakes. And they were all in the gates. The gates came open, and he flew out of that gate and took the lead in a mile and a half race and didn't look back. And he won the Triple Crown. That was amazing. And the early church kind of reminds me of that. Out of the gates fast and furious and explosive growth. And then we come to chapter 5 and the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

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And it was a sobering story. We said it was a correction that God brought to the early church. It was a story of this couple, this husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira. They made a donation to the church and, well, they lied about it. And Peter and the apostles confront them separately and said, you know, "You didn't lie to us. You lied to God. You lied to the Holy Spirit." It's a serious and sober and somber event. You read the story, and Ananias and Sapphira died that day. Can you imagine coming to church and you see a hearse outside? And they're wheeling out these two bodies. I mean, all of that momentum in the church, it seems like it's threatened to come to a screeching halt in Acts 5:1-11. But we learned some things from that story.

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Now we're picking up the story in verse 12. And here is what we discover. That little correction that took place in the first 11 verses didn't stop the momentum of the church one bit. Let's read on. "Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed."

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This reminds me of when Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Even a little correction, a very serious and somber one that came to the

church in the early part of Acts 5. It didn't stop God's plan. Everybody just needed to take a deep breath and realize God was still on the throne. He was still in charge of His church. People were still coming to faith in Christ. And what we read about here is that many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. A supernatural demonstration of the power of God was taking place, and there were at least three results from this that I read about in just these verses.

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Number one is salvation. People were still coming to faith in Jesus Christ. It says there that "more than ever...more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." We've gone from actual numbers—3,000, 5,000—now to "more than ever." Some scholars believe the early church was as many as 15 to 20,000 people gathering there in Jerusalem in a very short period of time. And so when there is the clear demonstration of the power of God, well, salvation is taking place.

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There is also superstition that kind of creeps in here. You see what's happening? It says here that "many signs and wonders were done regularly among the people by the hands of the apostles." Notice, not everybody in the church had the supernatural gift of healing and signs and wonders. This is the apostolic age. It was coming through the hands of the apostles, just those 12 who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And during the apostolic age, signs and wonders were used to confirm and affirm the message. But something was happening here. People were beginning to hear about all the healings. And they were lining up outside the temple and in the city streets of Jerusalem. And some people were saying, "Hey, if you just lie right here, Peter might come by. And his shadow might fall on you, and you'll be healed." Now, read the story carefully. It doesn't say that was happening. It says that people were saying it was happening. It was a superstition that arose.

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You remember in the Gospels, you know, Jesus was always careful with miracles. He often said to the person who was healed, "Shh, don't go tell anybody." Why would He do that? Because He knew of our tendency to take a miracle and turn it into a superstition. And the superstition would then supersede the message. The message is always more important than the miracle. Don't ever forget that. And He kind of tamped down and did privately some miracles. Certainly some publicly, but He was always hesitant to let the miracle supersede the message, which was far more important. We see superstitions today. Every once in a while I hear about...I guess they call them Weeping Marys, you know, somewhere in some part of the world, maybe South America or some place. And it's a rock formation or something that kind of looks like a face of Mary. And thousands of people will migrate to those places. It's not faith. It's really bordering on superstition.

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And this was happening in the early church with regard to Peter's shadow. But when you have the powerful demonstration of the power of God, as was happening here, salvation experienced mixed in with some superstition, the third thing that I see here is a confrontation coming. And we read about it in verses 17 and 18. "But the high priest rose up, and all who

were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.” We’ve gone from a correction in the church...it was off and running, right, to the races and going really well, a correction with the story of Ananias and Sapphira, the clear demonstration of the power of God and the continuing of God’s plan, and then the confrontation that comes from the Sadducees and the high priests, who were going to tell the apostles once again, “Stop speaking in the name of Jesus.”

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And all of this is a reminder to me of something that the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians about. Just kind of a background understanding of what’s happened here. Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians 6:12, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Friends, when there is the clear demonstration of the power of God, expect salvation. Expect some kind of weird superstitions to threaten and creep into the church. But also expect confrontation. Confrontation from the culture. Gospel ministry is full of confrontation. We don’t like to think of it that way, but it’s all over the book of Acts. And the Sadducees and the high priests threw not just Peter, but all of the apostles, all 12 of them, in prison over this. It’s not the first time they went to prison. It won’t be the last time they were thrown in prison because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But all of it is tantamount to spiritual warfare, okay. We don’t wrestle with flesh and blood. Their enemy was not the Sadducees and the high priests. There is a spiritual battle going on, and Paul pulls back the veil, as it were, and gives us a picture of that.

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It leads me to say this, friends. Our broken world will never make sense to us until we look behind the visible to see the invisible, to see the spiritual battle that is taking place. If we don’t understand there is a spiritual battle going on, we will always fight confrontation and battles like this in the flesh rather than using spiritual weaponry, armoring ourselves with the armor of God, as Paul talks about in Ephesians 6, and using spiritual weaponry, the first of which is prayer and the Word of God and all of that to fight spiritual battles.

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So with that as a background, let’s just kind of work our way through the story a little bit. This confrontation comes because of jealousy on the part of the Sadducees there. It says that they were filled with jealousy, and they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. They are intimidating them. They are threatening them. They finally arrest them. And, again, it’s not the first time Peter was arrested, and it won’t be the last time. I gotta wonder what Peter might have said to his wife that day. I can just picture him texting his wife, “Sorry, honey, I’m going to be home late for dinner tonight. Thrown in prison again.” I mean, what a challenge it is to do gospel ministry here, even as it trickles into this family. You know, it had to impact the family in that way. And all of the apostles thrown into prison here.

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It goes from this jealousy and intimidation and arrest to what I call a supernatural prison break. And here is where I love the story. Verse 19, “But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak

to the people all the words of this Life.’ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ‘We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.’ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, ‘Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.”

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I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall. I mean, this is where I chuckle a little bit, because this was a supernatural prison break where the angel of the Lord in the middle of the night let Peter and the apostles out. It’s not the story we always think about, you know, when we sing the Amy Grant song, “Angels watching over you.” That’s about a different prison break later in the book of Acts. But this is the first one. We don’t talk about this one very much.

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But here Peter and the apostles were in the prison. The angel of the Lord shows up and lets them out. The irony here is that the Sadducees are all part of the confrontation, and the Sadducees didn’t believe in the supernatural. They didn’t believe in the resurrection. They didn’t believe in angels and demons and, you know, the heavenly places and the invisible realm and all that. I just find that very ironic in the story, because the angel of the Lord is front and center here. And the next morning they all get up, and they have this council meeting. And they say, “Go get the prisoners.” And they go. And it’s all locked. But they open it up, and they’re gone. That’s the funny part of it all. I would have loved to have seen the perplexed look on all their faces. And as they’re discussing this, somebody walks in the room. And he says, “Well, they’re back over there at the temple in Solomon’s portico, and they’re saying the things that we told them not to say.”

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By the way, when the church faced confrontation here from the culture, the angel of the Lord didn’t say to them, “Now, you need to organize a protest and a boycott. You’ve got to get after these guys because they’re getting in their way.” You know what the angel of the Lord told them to do? Just go back and be at the church. Just go back and proclaim the message- Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead. Just go be the church. And they had found this little place over here called Solomon’s portico. Let’s just call it a room or an outdoor area in the temple that they had kind of carved out for themselves. And it was the place that the early church met when they met in the temple and then, you know, from house to house later in the week. They returned to that place, and they just started doing church. How powerful is that? And the guards and the council walked down there. And they didn’t want to make a scene because they were very concerned about all of the political things going on between the Jews. And they didn’t want a bad word to get back to the Romans. So somehow they coaxed the apostles back to meet with the council.

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So we go from jealousy and intimidation and arrest to a supernatural prison break, and then to more threats to their freedom of speech. Watch it in verse 17 here. Listen to this. “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.’” This is not the first time, but at least the second time...and I’ll say it in just our 21st century language...they’re threatening their freedom of speech. They’re saying, “We told you not to speak in the name of Jesus and to tell that story about Him being crucified and rising again. We told you not to do that, but here you are again.”

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And you know what Peter said? He says, “You know, you're right. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done that and we won’t do that again.” Not at all. This is...you’ve just got to go three cheers to Peter and the apostles here. And it’s where I get the title of this message, “Obeying God Not Man,” because Peter says in verse 29...it says, “But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’” We go from threats to freedom of speech and all of that, now to Peter and the apostles making a decision to stand strong, to stand strong and to say, “No, we’ve got to draw a line in the sand here. We have to obey God and not man.” And then Peter goes on to say this. He says in verse 30, “‘The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’”

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Now, Peter was not an educated man. He was a fisherman. And these Sadducees and the high priests, they were the religious elite. They were not only well educated, but very, very wealthy and very, very well connected politically. And they kind of looked down their noses at little old Peter the fisherman and those apostle, not educated men. But, you know, I’ve got to give Peter credit here. Full of the Holy Spirit, he always had the right words to say, and at the right time. And he stood with courage. And I’m going to say even with a little bit of kindness. I don’t see any ugliness. He’s just speaking the truth. And of course we don’t know the tone, but don’t impose a nasty tone or anything like that in it. You know, he stood with courage and just spoke the truth to power. How much courage does that take?

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And maybe in your life you’ve got a line that’s being drawn in the proverbial sand. And the question is, are you going to obey God, or are you going to obey man? Will you have the courage to stand up for the truth and obey God and not man? Or will you cave in to the pressure there? This confrontation here reads almost like today’s newspaper. Because, friends, there are (0:19:00.1) challenges to our freedom of speech and the exercise of religion and all of that today that we have to deal with even as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what I’m just suggesting, what I’m taking from this 2000-year-old story and how it applies to me and to us today is I’m praying that God would give us the courage and the kindness to obey Him and not man and to take a stand where we need to take a stand.

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You say, “Pastor, how do we do that? Where do we do that?” Well, just by way of application, I can think of at least three cultural confrontations that are taking place today that you might have experienced individually as a follower of Jesus. Certainly the church as a whole in our culture is facing. And we need the courage and, yes, the kindness at the same time to say, “Listen, this is our story and we’re sticking to it.” That’s kind of what Peter said. This is my story. This is our (0:20:00.1) story. We’re sticking to it. Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins. That’s what we’re all about. And we’re not going to back down from proclaiming that. In fact, we invite you to be a part of that because this has changed our lives. We are eyewitnesses to this event. Where do we need the courage to obey God and not man today? Let me suggest three ways.

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Number one, obey God and not man when it comes to life. And I’m talking about defending life in the womb. This has been a cultural confrontation with people of faith and the church for more than generation. And we need some continuing courage. I don’t know if we’re reaching a tipping point or not where a majority of Americans, you know, say, “Listen, we’re going to defend life from the moment of conception. We have murdered 50+ million babies since Roe v. Wade. There was a fight in the British parliament a century or so ago over slavery. And there was a guy named William Wilberforce, a member of parliament, who courageously...and with kindness...but courageously stood against slavery in Britain. And William Wilberforce is the one that history points to because of his tenacity, because of his commitment, because of his, “I’m just not gonna back down on this. This is my story and I’m sticking to it.” And finally slavery was gone in Britain. We need some William Wilberforces in the church today. When I was a pastor in Washington, D.C., I met a couple of congress people, the names that you would probably recognize. One in particular I had lunch with five or six times. And I remember him telling me that every year that he was in congress...and he was there for a long time...he introduced legislation to defund Roe v. Wade to defend life. And he was just drip, drip, drip, drip, year after year after year. If I mentioned his name, you would recognize him. And he is still at it today. And are we reaching a tipping point?

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As a church, we need to stand strong and say we’re going to obey God not man. There have been some businesses, well known businesses when it comes to health insurance and all of that, that say, “We’re going to obey God and not man.” It takes courage, courage mixed with kindness, to come face to face with this kind of confrontation.

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Here is a second area. Obey God and not man when it comes to marriage. Phew! Is it heating up in our culture or what? We’re going through a cultural revolution when it comes to the definition of marriage, let alone what male and female means. I was in Atlanta this past week, and I had the opportunity to not only gather with my family, but I officiated at a family wedding. And that’s always a little interesting because, you know, you’re an uncle and you’re a pastor at the same time. And you’ve got your big brother sitting down in the front row kind of looking at you, like, “Little bro, don’t mess this up. This is my son.” But we had a great time. And my nephew is an officer in the United States Navy in the nuclear sub program. Wow! He’s

a smart kid, and he married his college sweetheart. But we had a great family time. But I'm finding more and more as I do weddings today that I will work into kind of my introduction and welcome just an understanding of what marriage is. And at some point I say, you know, God is the author of marriage. God created marriage. He created us for relationships- a relationship with him vertically, a relationship with one another horizontally. And the most precious relationship that many of us have is that horizontal relationship that we call marriage. And God gave us and created marriage to glorify Him and also to give us enjoyment and all those kinds of things. And marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with His church. There is a mystery there, and so on and so forth.

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And I'm saying more and more that God and God alone, who created marriage, reserves the right to define marriage at any time, at any place to any people and in any generation. It's His deal. We used to have a saying in Texas, "Don't mess with Texas." It was kind of a "don't litter" thing. Well, listen, don't mess with marriage. It's God's deal.

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The biblical definition of marriage is one man with one woman in a covenant relationship for one lifetime. Here is what happened a generation ago. We tinkered with the "one lifetime" part. And no fault divorce became the law of the land. And the ripple effect of that through our nation and through the fabric of our families and community has been devastating. Now we're tinkering with the "one man with one woman" part. And I say strap on your seatbelts, friends. It'll be another generation before we feel the full effects of the messing with God when it comes to marriage.

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And my question is, will we obey God and not man as the church? Do we have the courage and, yes, the kindness at the same time to say, "No, I will obey God and not man." Peter had been thrown into prison how many times? And I just think about the ripple effect to his family. Do we have the courage to take the stand for truth in a kind way, but to stand for truth? I hope that we do.

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Here's a third area that I'll touch on. Obey God not man when it comes to life, when it comes to marriage and, finally, when it comes to the gospel, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The message that the early apostles proclaimed—Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins—this was their story and they were sticking to it. But so many Christians easily kind of waffle. And, you know, the culture would like for us to say that Jesus was *a* way and mitigate the exclusivity and the uniqueness of the gospel. But that's not what Jesus said. It's not what the early apostles say. You just go back a chapter in chapter 4 and verse 12, and Apostle Peter says of Jesus, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. No other name means no other name. And it echoes what Jesus said, that, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by Me." We don't say that with unkindness and meanness in our heart. We say it because it's true.

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But will we as a church...and every generation has to fight for the purity of the gospel. Don't forget that, friends. And it'll come with great confrontation. Jude told us to "contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints," that faith that was delivered to the saints 2000 years ago. There is a battle, a spiritual battle going on for the purity of the gospel. And we have to stand as a church with courage and with kindness that it's Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins. He ascended to the Father, and He is coming again. That's our story, and we're sticking to it, right? Amen.

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Obedying God and not man takes courage, takes kindness. And I pray today that we have both in full measure to be able to just be the church that God has called us to be in what is sometimes a hostile culture. But take courage, friends. It's been that way for 2000 years. It was that way for the early apostles. And they took great risks for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes those risks will come down to a relationship between a neighbor or a friend or maybe a job you may or may not get or something. Have courage. Say it with kindness. But be the church where you are. We don't just go to church. That's an event. We are the church. And you as a believer in Jesus Christ and I, we're expressions of the church seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days out of the year in some area. The place that you live, the place that you work, the place that you have influence that I'll never have influence. And you may be the only expression of the church in that area. And there comes a time where you have to take a stand and say, "I'm going to obey God and not man." And I just pray that God will give every one of us the courage and the kindness to do that.

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