

Sermon Text for December 31, 2017

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Joshua 2:1-6, Romans 11:28-32

“When disobedience is a good thing”

When disobedience is a good thing. You should know by now that I try to get your attention in the title every now and then. A few years ago I preached on hanging out with sinners. But today, Paul gives us an opportunity to pause and think about this. As a parent, disobedience is not a good thing and it creates a lot of anxiety for the parents and the entire house. There is nothing like a child who is having a bad day to completely set the tone and destroy any good environment there may be.

If you want to find an example of disobedience in Scripture, well the opportunities are endless. It is like a mosquito in a nudist colony. There is a lot of good material. The same is true in this world in which we live. People are tired of watching the news because it is filled with people behaving badly, to say it mildly. How can disobedience be a good thing?

We dive back into Romans and to be honest, this is a hard Scripture. It is New Year’s Eve morning, but it is a good time to think about not just the year behind us, but what is ahead as well. Next week we will be participating in our covenant renewal service where we basically promise to be obedient and confess of those times when we have been disobedient. But today, let’s look at an impact that disobedience has. Paul tells us that the disobedience that we see, the disobedience of which at times we are a part of can play right into God’s salvific hands. God can make disobedience into a good thing, just as Paul states, the disobedience of the people of God, the Jews, opened the door for the salvation of gentiles. This disobedience then allowed God to show mercy to all, Jew and gentile alike.

Today Paul tells us that as Christians we know that God can take all things and turn them around for God’s purposes. It is almost a reminder that all things work for good for those who trust in God. Let’s be reminded of that again.

READ SCRIPTURE

If you are not familiar with the Rahab story, you need to be. Read it again in Joshua. The Israelites have just sent spies to spy out the land for a future conquest. They find themselves spending the night there in a prostitute’s home. Don’t let that just pass

by as if nothing had happened. The implications of that sentence and that whole scene, how did the spies find themselves there in the first place? I would say that is disobedience number 1. The king of the land about to be conquered sends men to get the spies and Rahab tells them that they had already left. She lies to them and directly disobeys the king. Disobedience number 2.

This is our first example in Scripture of civil disobedience. Rahab ends up saving the men and by this action she saves herself and her family as well from the destruction that comes with a conquering of the land. In Hebrews 11:31 she is called a woman of faith and she is juxtaposed directly with those who were disobedient. She is not called a liar and in fact those of Jericho were called disobedient. Again in James 2:25 she is called one who is justified in what she did and it was a reflection of her faith.

Was her disobedience to a lower law, that of the king, a good thing when put up against the disobedience to God's law? Scripture seems to confirm that and in fact she is even listed in Jesus' genealogy as one of his great-great-so on grandmothers.

Disobedience, is it ever a good thing? Indirectly, Paul says yes.

Look at Romans, the verses we read this morning use the term disobedience 4 times. Paul sets the stage again in verses 28 and 29 to talk about the Israelites as being enemies to the Gospel, to the good news. Enemies to the message that Jesus Christ brought because they turned their back to it. But because of their status as chosen, they are beloved by God. Once God has given you God's grace, God's gifts, God will not take them away.

This says a lot for those of us who are disobedient. What Paul is saying in these verses is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ means nothing to the Israelites because they do not live in its glory. But God chose them by grace and God does not go back on God's choosing. We have been chosen by grace and God never goes back on that choosing.

Let's look at verses 30-32 where disobedience is mentioned 4 times. In the Greek disobedience is the term *apatheos*. What does that sound like? Apathy, that's right. When you are apathetic, you just don't care, you have no emotions.

Paul says that is what is at the root of disobedience, our disobedience comes from not caring. We just don't care. Is there something in this church that can change the lives of individuals? Are we positioned ideally to make significant changes by even more social services than just a food bank? How has our end of year giving affected

individuals that may have lost hope? Who cares? There is a lot of apathy. If you are not part of the solution then you are part of the problem. Disobedience for Paul is apathy, it is not caring what is happening in the life of the church.

I think the crisis in faith that is taking place is a general apathy about God. There should be couples, singles, college kids clamoring for Bible studies, falling over each other to lead it. An apathetic church is a disobedient one. This is what Paul says about the people of Israel that can be applied to the church. The apathy, the disobedience, we are now at verse 30, of the people of Israel opened the door to our salvation.

I am not crazy about the premise that evil exists for the mere purpose of shedding light on good. If evil were not around then we would not be able to appreciate good. I don't like that premise because good is able to stand alone on its own. But here Paul uses that kind of logic. He states that because the Jews were disobedient by being enemies to the good news, that opened the door to salvation for the gentiles, for us. Their disobedience was a good thing for us, otherwise we would not have been part of God's plan. Because of their disobedience we are saved. Now that we are saved by God's mercy, then the Jews now have an opportunity again to be loved by God as we bring the good news to all people.

Disobedience is more than matched by God's mercy. Just when you think that that which goes against God has the upper hand, God raises the stakes even higher. In fact, God uses the stuff of human disobedience to shape God's mercy. The very opposition to God, our disobedience, becomes the means by which God's plan can be realized.

Anytime we talk about understanding God's plan we are treading on very thin ice. We cannot know completely how this works. Why didn't God just make us obedient to begin with? In verse 25 Paul states that this is all a mystery. But it is in these verses that Paul tells us that this mystery is revealed.

You know there is something about mystery that is intriguing. When I was in college I joined a fraternity and we had a secret handshake, secret code words, a secret room where the recruits were initiated. It sounds childish, and it was, but it was fun. Today, any organization that has these types of secrets, especially if they claim to be religious, are at best childish, and at worst dangerous. The beauty about Christianity is that it provides freedom and there are no secrets. When you join the church you don't

receive a secret Presbyterian code word like Calvin, you don't get to be married or a part of a secret club. You join a group of sinners who do not know all the answers and aren't afraid to admit it.

This is what Paul gets to here. It is a mystery how our disobedience does not destroy what God has prepared for us. It is a mystery how our apathy has not completely turned God against us and enraged God so that God has finally, ultimately turned God's back on us. In fact, think about Christ and you see that quite the opposite is true. Things were spinning so out of control. Every step of the way the people of God got into more and more trouble. Jesus was hated, spat upon, despised. And yet every step of the way we see Jesus constantly displaying God's love to the disobedient. The culmination of God's action toward our disobedience was..., well, this, and that.

Do not be mistaken, every action we take has a counter action. Our disobedience affects not only us but those around us. Spouses who have been subject to infidelity know that. Children who have been abandoned by their parents know that. Parents whose children are out of control know that. Our actions affect those around us. Our disobedience affects loved ones and even those we do not know.

But they do not deter God from pursuing God's course for us which is mercy. Rebellion can even serve the purpose of salvation. If we can understand that this is true, then we can only have utter confidence in that God, knowing his plan may seem to be going awry, spinning out of control, but God is still in control.

Today, it does seem like things are spinning out of control. The opioid crisis is at levels never seen before and it affects us directly. Terrorism is striking our own neighborhoods, the list could continue. Our communities continue to struggle with some very difficult, fundamental issues. Our church is making some very important, monumental decisions, and we can't help but wonder if we are heading on the right path.

In all these things, listen to the Good News. God is in control. God's mercy is being revealed this moment as we speak. Rely upon that mercy and know that it will conquer all. Amen.