

Civil Disobedience in the Bible, Part Two (New Testament)

Various Passages

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 24, 2023

Good morning, everyone. On the wall of my house in Chilliwack, hangs a framed page from the Geneva Bible. It was given to me as a Christmas present several years ago. It's a Bible that was originally printed in the 1500s. I think it's the oldest thing in Sardis; I'm not sure. I'm guessing it probably is. The significance to it is that it was the first English Bible ever printed with study notes. There are older English Bibles, and there are other ones that came before that, but this was the first one that had notes in the margin that you could read that would help you learn as you looked into the Word of God, which is why it was a very dangerous Bible to read at the time. Because there were several notes in it that indicated that it was a Christian's duty to submit to God before the king, see the problem? It was his job to follow Christ before any other human authority; seems like a simple thing to say. In this day and age, it doesn't seem like that would be any kind of an issue, but at the time, it made the King of England very angry. He didn't like it, he labeled it as seditious, which meant that you read it at your own risk. It's probably not a coincidence that this is the Bible the Pilgrims took with them on the Mayflower, a lot of significance to that.

For example, in the study notes in Daniel 6 where Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, it says Daniel disobeyed the king in order to honour God and so he did no injury to himself. In other words, he made the right choice. Daniel made the appropriate decision when he did that because there comes a time in every believer's life when he has to choose God over the government. Also in the notes of Exodus chapter one, the story of the Hebrew midwives, it says that their action was good when they transgressed Egypt's laws because they did that in order to keep from transgressing God's laws, which is what made it a righteous act. One more study note here, the study notes of 2 Chronicles 15, or the story of the time King Asa failed to obey the Lord by removing some false idols. In the margin, it said, the King acted foolishly. Because he's not perfect; he's just a man and nothing more.

And that kind of talk infuriated England's ruler at the time, to the point he ordered his subjects, his immediate subjects not to read it. He had some of his soldiers go through the countryside and try to confiscate these Bibles, at which time he commissioned a team of men to go back to the drawing board in order to translate an entirely new copy of the Bible into English without any study notes at all. Do you know what it's called? It's called the King James Bible. That ruler that was so upset was named King James. And as a result, he gave us a totally new edition of the Bible. Out of curiosity, how many of you grew up reading the King James Bible? Yeah, just almost all of us. Right? A lot of us did. You familiar with 'thees' and 'thous'? Yeah. Well, that's where it all came from.

And the reason I mentioned this is because it shows you that the church has always wrestled with the issue of the government whether it's in the 16th century, or the 17th century, or the 21st century, it's always had a difficult time figuring out what to do with the political authorities. It's nothing new. Jesus

said, "In this world, you will have tribulation." And the truth is that the tribulation comes from a number of places. It can come from your family, tribulation can come from your friends, and it can come from the hands of the king.

When you study history, you would think that if anytime in the world when people should get along with the king, it would be in the 17th century; he was a Christian king. They had Christian laws, they had a Christian nation, Christian values. And what do you see? You see that they butted heads. Because this type of thing has been going on for centuries.

And it raises the question, well, what are we supposed to do then? I mean, how do we handle it when a government acts that way, and they take our favorite copy of the Bible, and they tell us not to read it and they confiscate it? Well, the answer is that you can defy. God has given you the freedom to do that. And you can resist that sort of thing. He's given you that liberty because the government is an authority, but it's not an ultimate authority. And it has power, but it doesn't have unlimited power; there are constraints, which means they don't have the right to ask what you to do whatever they want and expect you to obey. There's just more to the conversation than that. There are times when believers need to stand up to this.

And in order to help you see that in this series last week, we looked at several examples of civil disobedience in the Old Testament. And I showed you how people like the Hebrew midwives, and Moses' parents, and Moses himself, defied the governing authorities. This week, I want to continue this study by showing you how people did in the New Testament as well. This type of thing does not stop in the Old Testament. It continues on into the second half of the Bible in the church. And that's what we're going to talk about today.

I told you last time, in preparation for this series, I shut myself in my office for quite a while and I opened up my Bible. And I wrote down all the times I could find when someone chose to resist the governing authorities. And it was kind of eye opening for me because there's quite a few of them in there. It's also eye opening because they didn't do it all the time. Let me add that. It's not like every other page they're defying, but they did it quite a bit. And I didn't get a chance to go through all of it last week, we're going to finish off this week's with this list. So we're going to talk about six examples of civil disobedience in the New Testament. So if you're taking notes, this is our outline, we're going to look at six examples of civil disobedience in the New Testament. These are on your handouts as well if you want to follow along.

And the first one is the example of the Magi. So the first example of civil disobedience in the New Testament, is the example of the Magi, which refers to the men who were asked by King Herod to tell him where Jesus was born in the Gospel of Matthew. And they said, no, they wouldn't do it. So if you want to turn there with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew.

And as you're doing that, I want to tell you the issue of civil disobedience, it is a common thing in the Bible. It's found quite a bit because here we are in the first few pages of the New Testament, and you see it there. You can't even get past a couple of verses or chapters, and it shows up. Because when the Old Testament ends, several things happen that plunge the world into chaos politically. One of them is the arrival of a man named Alexander the Great. That happens in the intertestamental times between the Testaments because what he did was to try to unite all of this part of the world under one banner. Before Alexander, the people spoke different languages, they had different rulers, that kind of thing. After him, he tried to put them all under one umbrella. Then when he died, another Empire started up called Rome, which does the same thing. Except whereas Alexander would take over a region and leave it unsupervised, Rome began to put their own puppet kings in each territory to make sure the people followed. And that's what you see in Matthew two.

Because in Matthew two, it introduces you to a puppet king named Herod. He wasn't a king in the traditional sense because he didn't rule on His own authority. He ruled under the jurisdiction of Rome. That's what he did. So he's not a king with a capital 'K'. He's kind of like a king with a lowercase 'k'. And as he does, he's not very popular because he's violent. He's horrifically violent. He was afraid someone would take the throne from him. He had a problem with paranoia, so he killed anyone that got in his way, including, get this, his wife, his mother, two of his sons, and his brother-in-law. How would you like to have a king like that? You want to talk about a tyrant? And while he's doing this, Matthew 2:1 says this, says, "Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod, the king," king with a lowercase 'k', "Magi from the east arrive in Jerusalem."

Now who are they? I just introduced you to Herod, but who are the Magi? I'm sure that's the name you're familiar with. We talk about them every year at Christmas. We just sang a Christmas song. Here's a Christmas character. Well, the name Magi comes from the word *magos* in Greek from which we get the word magic. They were magicians in the ancient world. Little more to it than that. They were kind of more like astronomers who would look to the stars for guidance. If you've been in the Middle East, and you've looked at the night sky and seen how bright the stars are that's why they did that sort of thing. Which is why they say in verse two, "where is he who was born King of the Jews? For we saw his star." The reason they said that is because they were always looking at stars. These guys were fascinated with stars, they adored the stars. In some cases, they worshipped the stars, the stars where their life.

And while they're doing that one night, the Lord uses a star to tell them about the birth of Jesus. And there's been a lot of discussion as to whether they were actually saved at this point. And truth be told, I couldn't get a clear answer to that; maybe they were, maybe they weren't. But it does mean that the Lord spoke, and they listened. He called out to these astronomers, and they obeyed.

And as they do, they come to the city of Jerusalem where Herod, just to kind of condense the story here, Herod tells them, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, five miles away. Bethlehem and Jerusalem were very close. So they should go see him. But here's the catch. He wanted them to come back to him

after they were done because he said he wanted to worship Jesus too, which was a lie. Herod didn't want to do that; he wanted to kill Jesus because he saw him as a threat to his throne. So here's the civil disobedience, the Magi refused. If you look down to the end of the passage here in verse 12. It says, "Having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi left for their own country, by another way."

As far as I could tell, that is the first example of civil disobedience in the New Testament. That's where it begins. When a group of astronomers decide to listen to God instead of man. As I told you last time, it doesn't start when they're mad. And it doesn't begin when they're so angry that they say, "I can't stand Herod, and I think he's so stupid; who does he think he is to boss me around?" That's not the kind of mentality here, it starts when they lift their eyes up to heaven, and they realize there's a greater power than Herod. And that's the one I'm going to bow down to first before anything else. I tell you that because this is where civil disobedience always begins in the Bible. It starts when you follow God and not man. And you put Him on the throne before anything else. The fact is that there are times when the government will tell you to do something that's wrong. And there are moments in a Christians life or believers' life or anyone's life, when they will ask you to act in ways that are sinful. And when it happens, you have a decision to make. You can please God or you can please the government, but you can't please both. And you can follow Christ, or you can follow the king; but you can go both ways. So you have a decision to make.

I mean, if you look at this passage, you can tell the Magi have two people speaking in their ears here. You see that they got two voices calling out to them. They have God and they have Herod. There is Yahweh, and then there's this king. And what does the king want them to do? He wants them to give Jesus up so he can murder Him. And they say no. So something every believer is going to have to wrestle with, you're always going to have two voices speaking in your head as a Christian. There will always be someone else calling out for your loyalty, saying, "hand over the Messiah, give Him up, compromise, turn your back on Him." And these guys show you that when that happens, you need to defy instead.

Brings you to another example of civil disobedience in the New Testament. We started off with the Magi. Let me give you another case of this. John the Baptist. That's a fiery guy, isn't it? We talked about Elijah last time. This is kind of like the Elijah in the New Testament. The example of John the Baptist. This is the time when he told Herod in Mark chapter six that it's wrong for him to have his brother's wife.

If you want to turn to Mark chapter six and I feel like I need to give you some background for this story as well because this is a different Herod. This is where the Bible can get confusing at times, but this is the previous man's son. There are five Herod's who lived during Bible times. The word "Herod" actually means warrior or hero. It's a nickname these guys gave themselves to show how great their dynasty was. Imagine calling yourself hero. So if you put them on a timeline, there is Hero the Great or Herod the

Great, Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa, and Herod Agrippa the second. And the one this is referring to is that third guy there, this is Herod Antipas. He took over the throne after his dad died; he was one of the ones who wasn't murdered in the purge. And when he did, he seduces his brother's wife into marrying him, which is what Mark 6 talks about when it says this. It says, "For Herod himself." This is verse 17, Mark 6:17, "For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her."

Now, as you read that, you would say, in 21st century eyes, yes, that's a problem, he should not have done that. But if you're in the first century, it might have been a little different for you. Because what Herod did was pretty mild compared to what other kings did. His behavior was pretty tame compared to other rulers. And so Herod might have had that impression. "What's the big deal here, John?" All the Caesars at this time that we know of the Roman Caesars were either immoral or bisexual, they slept with whoever they wanted to. slave or free, male or female, young or old, married or single, they didn't care. They had no restraints on their passions. It was the same way with lesser rulers because a lot of them had multiple wives, not just one or two, but they had lots of them. They had a harem in their palace. And so Herod could have been thinking to himself, "What's wrong with you, John? Why is this a big deal? Why are you calling me out on this? Why are you embarrassing me? You need to be taught some manners." And the big deal, the reason John says this is because he's reminding Herod here, you're not the king of any country, you're the king of Israel. And you're not ruling any place. You're ruling God's city, Jerusalem, and this is why you need to stop. You can't do this here." He says, "You might think you could do it somewhere else, you can't do it here. You can't act this way in God's place and think He won't notice." It's a different story. In the words of verse 18, he actually says it like this. He says, "It's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife," and that means you are not above the law, Herod. You don't have the right to ignore what God said just because you're king. What you did was wrong for anyone, including you. Take some courage to say that to a king, doesn't it? Would you want to say that to a murderous tyrant, or the son of a tyrant?

And if you're gonna draw a lesson from this, it would be this, it doesn't matter how great you are, you still answer to God, amen? And if you're gonna draw a principle, it doesn't matter whether you're a king or not, you still have to obey Him. You don't get a pass on this just because you're in charge. You don't get an exception just because you're Herod or someone like that. The same thing applies to the king that applies to everyone else in the world. And that is that you all bow to God. You're not up here while everyone else is down here. God will make you pay for the wicked things you've done, so the people in authority should not think of themselves more highly than they ought."

There was a phrase in Latin at the Puritans used to say, which said "Lex Rex." Which means the law is over the king, as opposed to Rex Lex, which says the king is over the law. See the difference? We need people to say this sort of thing to our rulers. We need men like John the Baptist to go to politicians and tell them you need to be humble instead of thinking of yourself too highly because the law is over you.

God is over you. They often forget. Some men begin to think they're untouchable when they're on the throne. This passage demonstrates that you're not. God can reach you on the throne.

It wasn't too long ago that a famous politician in the U.S. got caught in a scandal with another man's wife and his public relations guy said, "Your life is over. What do you want me to say about this?" And the politician said, "Nothing. It doesn't matter. Just as long as I don't lose votes, nobody cares." Well, the truth is God cares; it matters to Him. And someone needs to tell him that before he gets into trouble with God, or before he answers to God.

There was a time when the kings of old had a man who would do this for them; He was called the court minister in the old days in Europe. It was his job to confront the king whenever he was in sin. How would you like that job? He was in the entourage for that sole purpose. Because the king would do something, and the minister would say, "You shouldn't do that." It's kind of like his conscience on his shoulder. Or the King would say something, and then the minister would say, "You shouldn't say that." He would make a decision and the minister would reply, "God doesn't like that. I think you're wrong; you need to repent." Which often cost him his head, but he didn't care, the king needed to hear it. There were stories of some of those men getting locked up, being put in dungeons, tortured over this type of stuff so they would stop talking this way and they wouldn't. This is what John the Baptist does here.

If you read on to the rest of this passage, you'll see not only does he go to prison for this, but John would lose his head. Because he believed it was his job to be this bold. Makes me wonder, what would Canada be like if John the Baptist walked the halls of Parliament. He might lose his head, but before he did, he would go down in a blaze of glory, I think. He could be bold.

Brings it to another example of this civil disobedience and the New Testament, the example of Christ. A third example of civil disobedience in the New Testament is the example of Jesus himself when he refused to keep the laws of the Pharisees, which were often upheld by the government. That's where the civil disobedience comes into play. The laws of the Pharisees were often used by the political authorities to arrest people. So if you look in Matthew chapter 12, this is how Jesus interacts with them on this issue. In Matthew chapter 12.

We need to understand how Jesus responded to this because the Magi are important, and so is John the Baptist, but Christ is the most important person in the Bible. And this is the discussion here, Matthew 12:1, it says,

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

Now, when they tell him, “Your disciples do what is not lawful,” that means not lawful according to us. Not according to the Old Testament, but according to the Pharisee. Not by the laws of God, but by their laws that the Pharisees put into a system of books called the Talmud. It was very long, it contained several thousand pages, it was in six volumes, and one of those volumes was devoted almost entirely to the Sabbath. It was extra rules they came up with to tell you what you could and could not do on this day of the week. And it said things like you can't carry a load heavier than a dried fig on the Sabbath. If you did that that would be work. Anybody ever held a dried fig in your hand? Imagine going through a whole day trying not to pick up anything bigger than that. That would be work. Also, you couldn't eat anything larger than an olive. If you did, that would be work. So whatever you put in front of you for a meal had to be ground up into grains smaller than that because all the chewing would be effort and that's sin to them. You couldn't light a fire on the Sabbath or put one out. You couldn't write a letter, play games, have too many people over to your house; all that's work. They even had a list of things that you couldn't do in a field, so you couldn't sow, plow, reap, grind, bake, thresh, bind sheaves, winnow, sift grain.

That's what got the disciples in trouble in Matthew 12 because in the eyes of the Pharisees, they're doing some of this. Verse one says as they become hungry, they begin to pick the heads of grain and eat them; kind of grind them in their hand and eat them. Deuteronomy 23 says you could do that in your neighbor's field as long as you didn't use a sickle. You could get a meal that way, but the Pharisees still confront them over this.

And if you look, what does Jesus do in this passage? Well, He confronts them back. How does He respond? Well, He doesn't say, “This is no big deal. Guys put the grain down, don't make an issue of this.” He says, “No, you guys are wrong,” to the Pharisees. He says in verse three that David did a similar thing when he was hungry, and it was okay. God did not have a problem with that. So what's the problem here, Jesus says, and in verse five, He says the priests do a similar thing when they serve in the temple because they worked on the Sabbath too in that sense, and the Lord accepted it. And then in verse eight, He says, I'm the Lord of the Sabbath anyway; that's the final argument here. That means there's only one person who determines what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath, and that's Christ, not you guys. So He says, cut it out, knock it off, and drop it.

And the principle here, if you're tying this into the government, is that the Pharisees or the government or the Pharisees are kind of like a semi-governmental group here, doesn't have the right to reinterpret the Bible for you. They don't have the freedom to twist it and turn it and bend it according to their will and expect you to follow it. There are limits to their power, and this is one of them. There are boundaries that they cannot cross. And this is an example of that.

I was trying to think of a way to put this into modern term. And the thing that came to my mind was this, when the government told you that the church is not essential during Covid, did you have a problem with that? Well, you did. And when they suggested it's not as important as other things like Walmart or

Costco, or those other things that stayed open, did it bother you? Well, sure it did. Why? Because in your mind, you felt like they were twisting the teachings of Scripture. Now, were they trying to do that? Probably not. But that's how it came across to a lot of believers. And Jesus says the church is essential. In His eyes, it's the greatest thing in the world. And so that kind of terminology bothers you.

What about when they said we don't need to meet in order to worship God, or they said things that sort of implied that? Not just that we shouldn't meet during Covid because it's not safe, but some of the leaders almost suggested that we don't have to. That was troublesome as well. The Bible doesn't make that claim; it tells us believers should be together. But the point is, the government doesn't have the power to do things like that and expect us to be okay with it. They can't twist the Word of God. Now, again, I'm not saying that was their intention. I think there probably was some miscommunication there, but that is how it came off to a lot of people. We believe in a separation of church and state, which means the two things are not the same, that they're different. And the church has a realm of authority, the government has a realm of authority. And it's not the role of the government to take us over.

That's the kind of thing you see here with the Lord. You might think in a passage like this, Jesus would just blow it off. He doesn't. He tells the Pharisees, "This is the word of God we're talking about here and you're twisting it." So He stood up to them. By the way, this would be one of the things that got Jesus killed. If you look at his miracles, one thing you find out about Christ's miracles is that a lot of them were performed on the Sabbath. That's interesting. And it was done so He would show the Pharisees what the Sabbath was supposed to be about. And that made them so angry that they conspired to murder Him.

It brings us to another example of civil disobedience in the New Testament. We're just going through these one at a time here, so we can get through all of them. That's the example of the disciples. Another instance of this is the example of the disciples when the leaders of the Jews told them to stop speaking about Jesus and they refuse. We just read about that in our scripture reading time. It's found in the book of Acts, if you want to turn over there. The rest of these will come from the book of Acts, which is about the history of the early church. And what it says is fascinating because it tells us in the early years of the history of the church, the church grew so quickly that it caught the government by surprise, which is where a lot of the problems came into play.

When you read Acts, you often think "Well, why was there so many problems between the church and the state?" One reason because the church just exploded in numbers. And the government saw it as a threat. Acts 2:41 says when Peter preached the first Christian sermon at Pentecost, 3,000 people were saved as a result instantly, right away. And when that happened, the church swelled from a group of a few hundred people to thousands. Then after that in Acts 4:4 it says the number increased to 5,000. Because the excitement doesn't stop then; it just keeps ramping up more and more, the revival continues. And you don't have to turn to this one, but in Acts 11:21, it grows even more because there the Bible just calls it a large number. It got so huge, they couldn't even count it all up, so it's just considered to be big.

Which would have shocked the authorities. A movement like that would have been viewed as a serious danger to a country like Israel because Israel was so small.

So in response, the authorities do what they know to do, and that is to persecute. And we don't have time to go into every persecution, but one of them is found in chapter four. This is the first one that really draws your attention. It's the arrest of Peter and John. Because Acts 4 tells you how Peter had just performed a miracle in the temple. He healed a man right outside the gates, which was an innocent thing to do. Nothing wrong with that, but it draws attention that gets the government involved. And they bring him in for questioning. And as they do in Acts 4:18, they summon him and command him and John, not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. In other words, they put a gag order on them, which Peter does not abide by, because he tells him in verse 20, that we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard. He doesn't say, "we will not"; he says, "we cannot." He doesn't say, "we're going to decide not to." He says, "We can't help but speak about what we have." There's not a choice. The government says, "Don't tell anyone about Jesus." Peter says, "No".

Acts 5 says that he does a similar thing when they arrest him again. And there Peter gives the famous words in verse 29 of Acts 5 that "We must obey God rather than man." Do you see the word 'must' there? It's a compulsion. Gives you a taste of what's happening. Peter says, "We respect you as our authorities. We'll honour you here. We didn't run away from the arrest, but we don't answer to you first. First, we answer to God. Peter says, "I'm not a Jew first. First, I'm a Christian." I'm not under your jurisdiction, primarily. Primarily, I'm under heaven's. And that's why I'm going to act this way.

Peter story reminds us of the fact that salvation changes your loyalties. It makes you swap your allegiances from one thing to another. You start off saying, "I'm a Jew." You end up saying, "I'm a Christian." And you begin telling yourself, "I'm a child of Israel." You end up telling yourself before that "I'm a child of God." That's what matters. That's what's on the top shelf. That's what you see in the book of Acts. That's how all the disciples looked at this. When they would go to a place like Corinth or Philippi or Ephesus, they always did the same thing, and that was to baptize these people into the name of Christ. And they did that to show them that your loyalty is no longer primarily to Corinth or Philippi or Ephesus. Now it's to Jesus. He comes first.

When I grew up, they told us that there are three top priorities in Americans life, there's God, family, country. But when you get saved, it actually changes that because now the only thing really in the list is God and He puts everything else where He wants to put it. So that if He calls you to give up your family for Him, you do it. If He calls you to give up your friends for Him, you do it. And if He calls you to give up your country, you do that too. He owns all of it. When I came to Canada, I remember talking to some family members that had a problem because they said, "Well, what about America?" I said, "My loyalty is to Christ, and if Christ's Church is calling me here, that's where I go."

Brings it to another example of this and the New Testament. And now it's gonna get a little more serious, at least as far as the disciples go, it's been serious the whole time. But this really gets serious. That's the example of Steven; he's the first Christian martyr. He's the first one to give his life for the sake of Christ. John the Baptist was martyred before the crucifixion and resurrection. Steven is going to be martyred afterwards. And that will make him the first Christian martyr as we know it. Because things don't get better in the book of Acts for the church. They get worse in a sense with the government. Because after the authorities start arresting Christians, now they start killing them. And the first one to die is this man.

He's found over in Acts chapter six and seven because they accused him of blasphemy, a very serious charge, same charge they brought against Jesus. Because as Steven preached and taught the people, Acts 6:10 says his enemies were unable to cope with the wisdom with which he spoke; they couldn't stop him. They would show up to argue with them; they could not argue with them. The things he said were irrefutable. And so they did the next best thing, and that was to bring him before the authorities. The mentality was if you can't argue with the Christians just take them to jail, take them before the court.

At which point in Acts 7, Stephen does something strange because he gives the Jews a history lesson. When you read Acts 7, it strikes you as odd because he talks about the history of the Jews. Why did he do that? Because he's telling them in Acts 7 that Jesus is the next stage in your history as Jews. This is how he's witnessing to these people. He's showing them that Christ is the next phase in your story as the people of Israel and you blew it because you crucified Him. He says, "If you would have understood what God was doing in the lives of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob and Moses, and David, you would have seen this like layers on a house. And the next layer of the house is the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the culmination of the whole thing, and you killed Him. Talk about a sermon, right? If you were standing before the Sanhedrin, would you say that? This is a bold man. And it made them furious. So furious that at the end of the chapter, they murder him because they cut him off right in the middle of the sermon, and they stone him to death. And there's been discussion as to whether that was actually a court related execution or if it was just mob violence, and the answer is it was mob violence. Because they had a procedure to go through in order to execute someone, and they didn't do it. They're so irate that they just butchered him because Steven made the government mad.

He showed you that there are times as a Christian when you will make the authorities angry and so angry that they will lash out. You can't avoid it sometimes. You saw it in the days of the Geneva Bible, and you see it here. And you saw it in the times of King James in the 17th century where those believers made the king mad; it's happening in this one. The church has always sailed on stormy waters when it comes to politics and these types of things, and sometimes it plays itself out in violence. Steven's words are stormy here. There's no way to downplay that. If you look in verse 51 of chapter seven, just listen to what he says. He says, "You men who are stiff necked and uncircumcised," that is the subtle approach, "who are always resisting the Holy Spirit just as your father's did." I'm going to skip over a little here. "Which one of the prophets did your father's not persecute?" You who received the law as ordained by

angels, and yet did not keep it.” And I don't know about you, but when you read that, it's like the smoke is coming off the page, you can feel the flames whizzing by your head; the man is on fire. He's got both guns blazing. And so what do they do? They just attack him. That happens with the government sometimes. That's what makes it dangerous.

I want to mention that at the end here because after looking at these other examples, you might get the impression, it's fun to resist the government, and it's easy, because nothing bad ever happens when you do that. That's not true. This story shows you sometimes you can end up being martyred when you act this way. I read the story a few months ago about a man in North Korea, who shared the gospel with a friend of his because he had just become a Christian. And he just wanted to let his buddy know about it. And when he did, his friend ratted him out to the authorities, and he disappeared. Nobody ever heard from him again. That does happen. And it doesn't mean we stop sharing the gospel in places like North Korea because we shouldn't. And it doesn't apply that we should give up telling people about the Lord in those dangerous countries, it just means you have to count the cost when you do it.

One commentator said, “Steven is a good illustration of the truth that just because you're a Christian, it doesn't mean you'll have an easy life here on this earth. He is arguably one of the greatest men in the Bible, and his life ended in bloodshed.” It may be the same for us, but it shows us that when this happens, God will take care of us in the end.

If you read this story in parts, you find that as he was being executed, Steven saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, remember that? He's not sitting, He's standing because He took such an interest in this man's death that made Him rise to his feet. That's how the Lord treats the death of His saints. It's a precious thing to Him.

And brings us to one more example of disobedience in the Bible, civil disobedience in the New Testament. Just to go back over these other ones. The first one is the example of the Magi. And we saw with them how they obeyed God over the king, which is what led them to defy. They didn't do it because they were mad or angry or didn't like his politics, they did it because they believed there was something greater they should submit to and that was the Lord. That's how everyone looked at this issue in the list. Whether it's the Magi, or John the Baptist, or Christ, or the apostles, or Stephen. They believed the kingdom of God comes over the kingdom of man. That's something all of us should think today.

Let me give you one more example of this because it's going to round off this discussion of civil disobedience in the New Testament, and that is the example of who? It's one guy you have to talk about on this. Paul, right? The example of Paul. If there was ever a man who had trouble with the government, it was Paul. It was said when Paul came to town, he did not look for the nearest hotel because he wasn't going to stay there; he looked for the jailhouse. That's where he's going. Forget the Holiday Inn Express, this guy is going to end up in prison. And you see this in Acts chapter 16. Can see it in a lot of places here.

But after Stephen dies, the Bible tells us that a man gets saved by the name of Saul or Paul, as he's known; and when he does, he begins to preach like Steven did. And by preach, I mean, Paul preached. He went everywhere. And in chapter 16, he finds himself in a place called Philippi where he leads a slave girl to the Lord. When he does, her masters get upset with him because she had an evil spirit that earned money for them by telling people's fortunes, until the Lord drove it out of her through the work of Paul. So in verse 19, this is what happens in the town. It says,

But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."

The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order *them* to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Now, there's a lot to say about that, but when it says they beat him with rods, in verse 22, that phrase is noteworthy because it doesn't refer to any kind of rod, but a bundle of rods that were carried by the Roman person called the Roman *Lichter*, who served as a bodyguard to the magistrates. In other words, this act of violence was not just any act, it was an act of violence done on behalf of the government with their authority. They hit Paul and Silas, they beat them, they assaulted them, threw them into prison, all with the approval of the authorities without due process of law, I might add. We don't have time to go into what happens in the jail afterwards, but if you look down in verse 35, it picks up the story this way on the day after because it says,

Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men." And the jailer reported these words to Paul, *saying*, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.

Now, the reason Paul did all of that is because it was illegal for an official to beat a Roman citizen without a trial. That was in Roman law; there were major consequences against that sort of thing. And it's been discussed as to how you could tell someone was a Roman citizen, and there was some type of

wooden block or emblem that had information on it, you would keep it your house, you wouldn't take it everywhere with you. And that emblem gave you certain rights in the empire. One of those is you couldn't just be whipped or flogged or crucified at any old time. If that happened, the official could lose their job, the emperor could remove them from office, or if it was bad enough, the town of Philippi could lose its status as a Roman colony and forfeit the rights thereof. Or if it was bad enough, and the official murdered somebody, the official himself could be executed. Which is why the leaders of Philippi here respond this way. And they begged Paul and Silas to leave. They want the problem to go away. Just don't bother this because they were scared to death they might go down that road.

Because Paul understood, here's the principle, there is a time when you defend yourself against the government. There's a place for telling them you have beaten us without trial men who are Romans, and now you're just going to send us away secretly? No. You need to come apologize. You need to make this right. You need to say you're sorry. He probably did that because if he didn't, all the Christians in Philippi would be treated this way in the days and months to follow. So he's standing up for them because he reminds you that it's okay for a Christian to do that. Yes, you need to submit to the governing authorities. Yes, you need to honour them. Yes, you need to respect their leadership, but you also have the freedom to hold them responsible for the wicked things that they do. We could say that you have the freedom to seek legal counsel and hire a lawyer. You have the liberty to press charges and file a complaint if you have to. You can take this to court, go before the judge, not out of vengeance, just out of necessity to keep them from doing worse. That's what Paul is doing here. If he didn't do that, things would unravel even more for the church in Philippi. That's why he acted this way.

Over the summer, several of us went to the Free Reformed Church here in Chilliwack, to hear a gentleman named Marty Morris speak from the Justice Center for Constitutional Freedoms. They are, I told you before, they're a nonprofit organization in Canada, that represents things like the churches that opened during Covid, and the truckers' convoy and that kind of thing. And for those of us who were there, it was pretty sobering, wasn't it? I don't think many of us slept that night because we were all shocked at the evil things they're fighting in court right now. And one of them that hit home for us was about a family in Alberta, whose 12-year-old daughter had autism. And she was hanging out with boys her age at school, I mean, nothing bad, just spending time with them. And the teacher told her that she liked doing that because she was a boy, and she shouldn't tell her parents. And so the young girl did that. She kept that secret until the guilt started driving her crazy. And she tried to commit suicide, the father actually burst into the bathroom, and she was trying to hang herself. At which time the dad did what anybody would do, he pulled her out of school to keep her from that influence. And when the school found out about it, they called the authorities who showed up at their house and took the child away until the Justice Center got involved and help them resolve that in court to bring her home. And I bring that up to say what would happen if the parents didn't do that? What would have taken place if those Christians did not seek counsel and hire a lawyer, and press charges, and file a complaint, and take it to court, and defend themselves? The truth is, sometimes you have to do that, as a believer. You are living in a wicked world. You can look at Romans 1, and you can see what's happening in our society. And

you need to be salt and light, you need to be a gospel influence, but you also need to be wise and savvy and be as innocent as doves and wise as serpents, right?

And I'd like to say more about that but let me just stop here for a moment and ask the question. What are we learning from all of this? When you look at the life of Paul, or Steven, or all these other saints, what do they teach us about the government if we could put it in one big lesson. And I think if you could boil it down, it'll be the same lesson we learned last time. And that is the teaches us two things. There are two basic reasons why people disobeyed the government back then. They did it to keep from sinning, and they did it to keep from hurting their conscience. Do you remember that last time? They do it to keep from sinning, and they did it to keep from hurting their conscience.

You say, "Okay, well, what does that mean?" Well, if you go back over the list, you can look at the life of someone like Peter and the apostles, and you find they defied the government to keep from sinning. They did it because they had to speak out about what they had seen or heard, or else they would be disobeying God; they had no choice and there was no decision to make. The Lord told them in the Great Commission, "Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." It was their duty to teach, so when the government said don't do it, they had to defy. But on the other hand, you take the example of someone like Paul, and you see he disobeyed or rebuked the government over another thing, and that was his conscience. There was a voice inside his heart compelling him to act this way. The Bible does not tell you what to do when the government beats you up like this. You can't, to my knowledge, turn to a certain part of Scripture and find out how to handle it when they throw you on jail unlawfully. But he handled it this way because it was such a decision he made in here.

And that's okay, you say, "That's interesting. Pastor Jeremy, what does it have to do with my life today?" Well, it means there are going to be times when the government does something wrong, and you have to defy over this type of thing. And some of you will do it this way. And some of you will do it that way. There are going to be moments when they make a bad decision, and some of us will have to handle it in this direction. Some of it will handle it in that direction and it's okay. It's okay. There are going to be other times when it's not. When everyone will act the same way because the Bible is clear cut on the response, but there's times when it'll be different.

Let me give you a practical example of this. How is the church supposed to respond to the issue of free speech? We've been talking about that a lot today. So what should our reaction be when they try to get us to be silent about what we have seen and heard? Well, I think you should defy. You should resist. But the question is, what does that look like in every scenario? Can you point to one verse in the Bible that tells you? And you can't really do that. There's a lot of answers. When the government tells you you can't share the Gospel, you can protest. You can pray, should pray. You can write letters to them. Some people may want to run for office politically. You can defy them every single chance you get and stand up to them every single moment as possible, or you can pick and choose your battles. It goes back to the

conscience. Are you supposed to preach the gospel? Yes. Are you commanded to make disciples? Absolutely. But there's a lot of liberty as to how this is going to flesh itself out in a Romans one type of society.

Let me give you another example of this practically. What do you do with the issue of self-defense? How do you respond when the government throws you in prison unlawfully like they did with Paul. There's different answers to that one as well because you can protest, and you can write letters. You read the book of Acts, I always find it interesting, because it shows you some of them broke out of jail. As a Southerner, I like that. That happened a lot where I came from, I mean, they fled the persecution. Others stayed there and took it. Paul, in the book of Acts, he is under house arrest; he's in a jail of sorts. And he's not fleeing because there's lots of different liberty.

If you look back at the handouts I gave you in the bulletin and you'll see conscience mentioned a number of times. Because in Acts 9, Paul escapes the city of Damascus through a hole in the wall, while some of the leaders of the Jews were after him, although he did not have to do that. The Bible did not command him to do that; it was a decision he made of his own free will. It was the same way in Acts 8. When the early church scatters as a result of persecution. In Acts 7, Steven stands up and he's killed. That's one response. In Acts 8, they scatter. That's a totally different response. In Acts 12, Peter escapes jail. But my point is that people defy the government for all sorts of things. The Lord gave them that liberty.

Next week, I'm going to continue this discussion of the government by tying this into a passage that's important to talk about. And that's Romans 13. We have said a little bit about that, but we need to say more because some have interpreted Romans 13 as if it does not have any part to play in this discussion. That you don't have to submit to the government anymore or follow them in any way, but that's not actually true. The Lord still wants us to submit to them, but He wants us to balance that out with all we've said these past two weeks about defying. And that's what we're going to talk about next time we're together. So please come back and join us for that.

This week, let me just say, as I've done before, if you find all this talk about the government concerning, and it seems overwhelming, it doesn't have to. Because as I keep telling you, there's only one government you need to submit to at the end of the day before anything else, and that's the government or the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's only one King you have to bow down to primarily, and that's Him. The kings of this earth are going to come and go. They'll be here today and gone tomorrow. I'm in my 40s now; I cannot even keep track of all the presidents and senators and congressmen and premiers that have been in my life. There's only one King that's not like that, and that is Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us He is the Son of God, one with the Father, blessed Trinity. He came down from heaven to live a perfect life and go to the cross whereby He paid for our sins, pardoned our guilt, satisfied the wrath of God on our behalf, gave us forgiveness, defeated Satan, vanquished the powers of hell, shed His precious blood so that by His wounds, you could be healed, and He could say, "It's finished." There's no more guilt for us to pay if we believe.

You might say to that, “Well, you don't know what I've done, pastor Jeremy.” And you're right, I have no idea. And you might tell yourself you don't you have no idea how bad it is. And that's correct. I don't know how bad your life has been. But was it sinful? That's what He died for. Was your life evil? That's what took Him to the cross to take care of the evil, if you will give your life to Him. Will you do that today? I wouldn't be doing my job as an evangelist and a pastor, if I didn't point you back to the cross. We started off talking about the government, let's not stay there. Let's go to the cross. We're going to do that now at the Lord's table. But let me have a word of prayer for us, that God will be glorified as we partake of this together and prepare our hearts to do so.

Heavenly Father, we do come to You this morning with a sense of maybe being overwhelmed in some ways. It is always overwhelming to think about the government just because there is so much evil and wickedness and distortion there. Are there are good things too, but it's overshadowed by so much bad. It's confusing, we don't always know that what they're telling us, if it's true or not. And if it's accurate or not, and the news doesn't help. So Father, would You draw our hearts now this morning to something that's greater than that, and that is to Jesus. We're not the first ones to deal with these types of difficult things; they've been dealt with before. All these people we talked about this morning wrestled with this, but they put their hearts on Him. We need to do the same.

Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning. I know as they leave this place, they're going to go to an evil world. They'll go to jobs where there's evil, they'll go to neighborhoods where there's evil, they'll go to communities where there's wickedness. But there is a Saviour that's paid for all of that, that's triumphed over all of that? Who is King over all of them. Would You remind them of that this morning, that they would come out of here not with a sense of defeat, but with a sense of hope and victory in Him?

Lord, thank You for Christ. We know that if Canada comes and goes, and the U.S. comes and goes, and our leaders come and go, he'll always be there. May our thoughts be directed toward Him as we partake of the Lord's Supper. May He be glorified? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.