

Joyful Obedience

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Preacher: James Forsyth

[0 : 00] Well folks, good morning again. It's good to be with you. Before we dive into God's word, let's bow our heads and pray together. Let's pray.

Father, you have given us an almost unbelievable gospel, a gospel that requires nothing of us on the front end and yet gives everything to us on the back end. So we need the Spirit to be at work to help us believe such beautiful things. And we ask that you would do that now, that you would come, you would be in our midst, that you would comfort us where we need to be comforted, challenge us where we need to be challenged, that you would mess with our stuff in the way that we ourselves need to be messed with, that we might understand more of your love and its implications for our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Okay, two things that I love to do. I love to exercise and I love to eat. I love to do both of these things in equal measure and hopefully they offset each other. Sometimes they don't. I have seasons where they don't. It's what led one of my kids to describe me as the most in shape fat guy they know and so that's a danger that happens. But sometimes I also combine these two great loves like the time that I ate donuts while out on a run. Okay, anyone else ever done that? I have, by the end of our time together, I'm hoping to persuade you that it's actually a really good idea. Okay, but first let's dive into the text and work our way to that important conclusion. We come into this text and in this passage Paul is calling us to embrace a certain kind of life, the gospel life, the gospel life of joyful obedience. He's trying to get us to connect the dots between the gospel that we believe and the lives that we now concretely live. He wants us to understand that the gospel isn't just something that has saved us for eternity and it has saved us for eternity and he's going to get into that in this passage too. But it's not like the gospel has merely saved us for eternity and now we're sitting around waiting for that bus ticket to heaven. No, the gospel is so comprehensive. God's love toward us is so complete, so full, so radical that it has not only saved us but also changes us here today and that's what Paul wants us to understand. He wants us to understand how the gospel we believe changes the lives that we live. So look with me at verse one and let's get into the context of this passage as we enter into the scene here with Paul who's writing Titus on the island of Crete. He starts in verse one by giving a command. He says, remind them, let's remind the believers who are there in Crete and we can say by extension, remind all believers here today to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work. Remind them to be submissive and to be ready for every good work. Now what Paul is doing here is actually contrasting how Christians should behave with the behavior of corrupt leaders that he's seen in Crete. If you look down at verses 10 and following of chapter one, you see a description of these false teachers, these corrupt leaders. They are rebellious, they're insubordinate and Paul tells us they are unfit for any good work. So Paul says, don't be like them. These jokers over here, they're not following the Lord and they're unfit for any good work, but I don't want you to be like them. I want you to follow the Lord and be ready for every good work.

Be ready to live out your faith. He wants us to be, verse two, look at it there, model citizens. As we live life in this world, he says, speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, show perfect courtesy to all people. Isn't this just great, kind of earthy, practical wisdom from the Bible? It's so, so applicable to day-to-day life. He's saying, be models of kindness and love, especially in the way that you speak to each other. So that starts with those who are closest to us, with our flatmates perhaps, and not speaking about one another behind each other's back, but finding ways, looking for ways to encourage one another, to build one another up, so that when someone has an interaction with you, they leave better than they were before they had that interaction. Starts with those closest to us, of course, including our spouses. There's a sad reality, isn't it, that the closer you are to someone, often the shorter with them you'll be. I was convicted of this just a couple of weeks ago when Rosie

called me, my wife called me, and I was in the middle of doing something, and she was talking, and my side of the conversation went like this, and went, yep, okay, got it, bye, and hung up. And you know, if you noticed, like, in the classroom or in your office or wherever you might find it, you can always tell when someone's speaking to their spouse on the phone, because they speak with a brevity that they would never speak to anybody else with. So what did they do? Well, I had to call her back and apologize for not paying her the courtesy and attention that I would have paid to anybody else. Perhaps this is important with our friends, we think teens, remember, just never text anything that you wouldn't say in person, right? The Bible's calling us to use our language in a way that's different, but the challenging thing about what Paul says here is, yeah, we're to be model citizens in our language, but not only with those who are close to us. See how he extends to those we have problems with, see what he says there, speak evil of no one, no one. What about those challenging people? What about those obnoxious people? What about the weirdo in your office that you have a really hard time with? Yeah, it extends to them as well. We remember our mother's teaching, right? If you have nothing to say, say nothing. Hi, Mom. Sometimes, of course, there's a need for Christians to stand up and have a kind of prophetic voice, we'd call it to call out what's wrong with the world, to stand up for our convictions, but even in those circumstances, we're not to be contentious, we're not to be quarrelsome, we're not to be difficult.

There should be something profoundly unusual about the way Christians use their language. Paul gives the positive alternative to this command in Colossians 4, verse 6, when he says, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. Am I challenging? Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. Don't say things with which Jesus wouldn't agree. Imagine Jesus is with you, and then remember, he is, right? Don't say things that he would have to be like, no, back up, that's not right. Paul is challenging us to be model citizens, especially in the way that we use our words, and he's saying there should be something profoundly different about how Christians talk to how everybody else talks. And what a cultural impact we would have if we would joyfully obey this kind of call, this kind of command, in a day that loves outrage, in a day that loves to be offended, in a day that loves to meet heated rhetoric with equally inflamed rhetoric. How powerful it would be if we would speak differently. But here's the point. Paul's calling us to be exemplary citizens, models of kindness and love, but the point today is why? Why should our lives be different? And Paul's going to go on an answer, and his answer is because of the gospel.

[7 : 53] Our lives should be different because of the gospel. Let's get into that idea for a minute. First of all, look at verse 3. Paul says, we ourselves are once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another. Paul invites Christians to remember where they came from. That Christians are no better than anybody else. And if you're not a Christian and you have interacted with Christians who just seem to sort of have the moral high ground on everything and look down on other people, I just want you to know that that's not the kind of person the Bible called Christians to be. Christians ought to be the humblest people on the face of the earth because we know where we came from. We know that God didn't send Christ from the glories of heaven to earth to find us at the top of the moral totem pole. That Christ came to earth for us precisely to find us at the bottom because we were unable to do anything to save ourselves. We were rebellious. We were like those bad leaders on Crete. We slandered and quarreled and impressed. We were caught up, verse 3 says, in the cycle and contributed to the cycle of hatred that decimates lives. But now, we're free to live a different way. That's the point of verses 4 through 7. We're free to live a different way. Now, put one finger at the start of verse 4 and the other finger at the end of verse 7 and see that the verses that make up verse 4 through 7 in Greek, the language that the New Testament was written in, this makes up one big long sentence, right? One long run-on sentence where Paul is going to unpack several related ideas at the same time.

So let's see if we can get our minds and our hearts around what Paul says in these verses. He starts in verse 4 by saying, Christians should live differently. Remember the point, why should we live differently because of the gospel? We should live differently, verse 4, because the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior has appeared. So Paul's starting to unpack why our lives should be different. And he says, verse 4, because the goodness and loving kindness of Jesus has appeared. But the great thing that happens next is in verses 5 through 7, Paul gets distracted by the gospel. He's just brought up Jesus and to Paul, Jesus is like the squirrel, okay? Now that I'm thinking about Jesus, I can't just carry on with my thought. I want to celebrate him for a second. I

want to talk about how beautiful he is and how awesome this gospel that we have is. And so that's what he does in verse 5. He interrupts this thought, we should be good because of the gospel, to underline the gospel. Look what he does, verse 5. We've been saved not because of work done by us in righteousness, but according to God's own mercy. He develops this thought on the rest of 5 in verse 6 by describing how believers have been washed and cleansed by the renewing and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, who's not being poured out on us in small measure, but in abundance. He's been poured out on us to see it there, richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. And so the result comes in verse 7, we're justified by grace. Paul starts to talk about how the gospel underpins obedience and then gets distracted by Jesus because he wants to celebrate the fact that we're justified by grace. We're saved by grace. It's been about 20 years since Tom Hanks starred in the Save in Private Ryan, have you seen that movie? Okay? Follows Tom Hanks during the invasion of Normandy, World War II, and he and his team of Army Rangers have gone behind enemy lines in order to rescue Matt Damon, who is Private Ryan. Well, a long movie follows the exploits of this team. It's a kind of brutal movie, right? The first 20 minutes are infamous for their brutality, shows humanity at its best and also at its worst. Well, near the end of the movie, and listen, spoiler, it's been 20 years, okay? Like, you know, near the end of the movie, Tom Hanks finds Private Ryan. But in so doing, he's been injured and he's about to die, right? And this is where the great movie contains one kind of galling flaw. Do you remember the scene? Tom Hanks is lying on a bridge, Private Ryan's being saved. Tom Hanks looks him in the eye and says, hey, we found you, but now you have to earn this. You have to earn it. In other words, see all that me and my guys have done for you. Go and make it worth our while. Go and live a life that deserves this kind of rescue. Earn it. Earn this. Now, why is this such a galling flaw? It's such a galling flaw because no Army Ranger would ever say that. The motto of the 75th Regiment of Rangers is Sua Sponte, which means of their own accord. Army Rangers are proud to volunteer and ask for nothing in return. And so it is with Jesus, right? So it is with Jesus. And we're justified by grace. Jesus doesn't rise from the dead and say, hey, now, earn this. Earn it. See all that I've done for you. Do you remember that I died? Like, the least you can do is get your stuff together. Or I rose again. The least you can do is devote yourselves to good works. Or think of all I've done, like the least you guys can do is tithe, right?

Although you should also tithe. He doesn't rise again from the dead and say, earn this. Earn it. He rises again from the dead to give us salvation freely by his grace. We are justified by grace. And because we've been justified by grace, see how verse 7 ends, we're heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Heaven awaits. So that's Paul's sort of gospel distraction.

Verse 4, you know, good works are proumative by the gospel. But now that I'm talking about the gospel, I've got a little bit distracted. And now in verse 8, he returns to the original verse of verse 4. The original thought that we should live differently because of the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior. So see what he says in verse 8? He says, this saying is trustworthy. The gospel summary that I just gave you, it's trustworthy. You can trust it. You can believe it. And here are the key words. I want you to insist on these things. This gospel, this is something you're to be dogmatic about. This is something that you're not to have, you know, uncertainty or doubt about. The fact that we are saved completely and solely by the radical grace of God is something that for which there's to be no room for debate. I want you to insist on these things. Why? So that those who believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. Insist on the gospel so that believers will start to live differently. So that believers will start to be changed.

So see, Paul isn't appealing to guilt. Hey, remind the Christians of all the stuff they've done in order that they might live good works. He's saying, no, remind them of the gospel.

[15 : 06] Insist on the gospel. Insist on the free love of God in Christ because that is what will compel believers to devote themselves to good works. So we could summarize this passage by saying we used to live in foolishness, in disobedience, in deceit, even in hatred. And so being rebellious was to be expected of us, right? Because Christians are no better than anybody else. We were unfit for every good work. But now we've experienced the grace of God in Christ. And we've been forgiven by grace not because of righteous works, but because of his mercy. And so now we have the Holy Spirit to do what we couldn't do before, namely devote ourselves to good works. Paul's saying, connect the dots from the things you believe to the life that you live. I want to take just a moment to just apply this to how we think about the gospel. Because I think in our churches today, gospel living is just really misunderstood. What it is that empowers our obedience to the Lord is really misunderstood.

And I mean misunderstood by Christians. It's very important. We don't expect anyone's behavior to be different if they don't know Jesus. Because Christianity isn't about what you do, it's about what Jesus has done for us. But once we have received Jesus, there's often a misunderstanding about what motivates the kind of life that we now live. The data shows that the majority of Christians believe in what we would actually call a form of legalism, which is obey or God will get you. Obey or God will get you. Some Christians don't believe in legalism. They believe more what we would call licentiousness, which is obey or don't.

It doesn't really matter because God's going to forgive you. And then of course you have a section to me, the most infuriating section, who believe in the kind of prosperity living.

Obey and God will bless you. You can have your best life now. So many believers fall into these patterns and I'm sure we fall into these patterns as well. I know I do see these patterns functioning in our own lives, sometimes falling into legalism. How do you picture God? Do you view God as the frowning parent who right now is looking on you with a scowl disappointed with your latest report card? Perhaps you think of him more in the licentious way. How do you think of God as kind of this like benign grandparent who it doesn't really matter what you do. They're just going to love you all the same anyway. Perhaps you do fall into the prosperity way of thinking where you kind of think of God as the genie.

You know, like I've held up my side of the bargain, so now God should bless me in return. Well, the gospel motivation for obedience is so different. It says God has been kind to us not because we've earned it, but because of grace and the grace that saved us now empowers us to live new lives for God. And it's in complete opposition to those other ways of thinking. It's completely opposite to legalism. We don't obey in order to earn God's favor. We obey because we already have God's favor. It's in complete opposition to licentiousness. Of course, we want to live for the God who has loved us like he has.

[18:22] It's in complete opposition to the prosperity gospel too because it says, no, we don't expect our best life now. Our best life is yet to come. Verse seven, and we're living here until it arrives. Because of the past fall is saying what Christ has done, His gracious love shown to us at the cross. And because of the future, what Christ will do, returning to make all things new, we live now in the middle with His power in His pleasure to live lives for God, living with freedom and joy to be who we're made to be and do what we were made to do. It's the gospel and the gospel alone that helps us understand the place and importance of the lives that we live now. It stops us from falling into thinking that we need to lead lives in order to earn God's favor. And it stops us from falling into thinking that it doesn't really matter what we do because we already have God's favor. The gospel shows us a more beautiful way, not legalism, not license, not prosperity, but joyful obedience, connecting the dots from what we believe to how we live now that we've been loved by Christ, we can start to live like Christ. At work, at home, at play, we get up and intentionally think, okay, how would the gospel have me live this day? How would the gospel have me deal with this situation at work? How would the gospel have me interact with my friends or my spouse or my kids? How would the gospel shape the way that I'm spending my free time and my free money? How does the gospel shape the way that we're living our lives? Now, two applications as we close, okay? Nearly done. Two things that just, yeah, occurred to me and were in a sense encouraging to me as I reflected upon this truth and I hope will be encouraging to you as well. First one is a list that, remember that the gospel life of joyful obedience, right? Obedience is a hard word because it doesn't sound fun, right? But the gospel life of joyful obedience, when our obedience to God is motivated out of the joy of the gospel, the gospel life of joyful obedience is good for us. It's great for us. See, the opposite of obedience, the opposite of joyful obedience is sin. Sin just being when we do things we ought not to do, when we don't do things that we ought to do, surface behavior of course that's motivated by hearts that are wandering far from God.

Just understand, sin doesn't make you happy. It just doesn't. Now, it always promises that it will. It always holds out the promise of some kind of joy. Christians, you know, if you think, why in the moment do you sin? Then the answer is because you want to, because you think that it's going to give you something that will make you happy and yet we find that sin over promises and under delivers, it disappoints us every single time. We were made for so much more than that. We know that to be true. A couple of examples. We know that impurity and sexual addiction and pornography, we know those things don't make us happy. We know that. We know that they have a temptation in the moment. They have an allure in the moment but we also know that nobody ever

looked at pornography and then said, I feel really good about myself now. I really like the kind of person I'm becoming. I really like the kind of life that I'm living because we know that we were made for so much more than that.

We were made for real relationships with real people that are beautiful and awkward and messy and fun and through it all to experience a kind of intimacy we could never experience through something like porn. Or perhaps it's not impurity, perhaps it's materialism. So many of us spend so much of our lives worried about how we're going to get the next thing and yet we know that the next thing is ultimately never going to make us happy. We know that.

We know that the next promotion, the next job, the next home, the next car, the next thing. When the iPhone 37 comes, then we'll be happy. No, it's just not going to happen.

Why? Because you have been created with a soul that has such infinite capacity that it can never be satisfied by stuff even if you owned everything on earth. And yet the surpassing worth of Christ is such that the one drop of Him is enough. We know that stuff can't make us happy. We'd be made for more than that. Or even just take the example of this text. We know that we weren't made to speak evil of other people, to use our words to beat others down, get our own way, prove ourselves right. We know that we were made for loving God and for loving our neighbors and that there's great joy. It's not great joy and just the freedom of self-forgetfulness. The humility of not thinking about yourself, not worrying if you are right, not always having to have the last word. Joyful obedience, the gospel life, following God and the details of your life will make you happier than anything else on earth. Now I'm not saying some silly, daft, naive, idealistic happiness where it's like sunshine and rainbows and candy and roses every moment. Yes, Christian life involves hardship and struggle and suffering, but even in those places we find Christ and find joy in Him. When we think about obedience, I don't know what's going on in your life right now.

[24 : 09] I don't know if there's an area that you're struggling to obey God in. Christians, if there's a sin you keep returning to or a thing that you're struggling with, can we just remind ourselves that if you obeyed you would be happier. If you lived as God has designed you to live, you would flourish as He has intended for you to flourish. Don't go barking up the wrong trees. Money, sex and power, they're never going to get it done. Come to Christ and follow Him. Love Him as you've been loved. Second, close an application and we're done. This gospel life of joyful obedience where our lives are different because of the gospel isn't just good for us, it's also really good for our world, for our witness, for our mission in this world. One of the things that's interesting throughout the book of Titus is how Paul will reiterate a couple of times how the lives that we live, the lives that we live, not the things we believe, but the lives that Christians live, impact the reputation and reception of the gospel amongst those who don't believe. He's saying, don't think that your witness is solely about the moment of evangelism when you have a chance to kind of explain the gospel to someone. That's a part of it, but understand that our witness amongst the world is also greatly impacted by the kind of people that we are and the kind of lives that we lead. In other words, our lives can make the gospel easier or harder to believe. And so you know, perhaps you're not a Christian today and you say, you know, one of the things I find really difficult about Christians is just their hypocrites.

You know, Jesus is harder on hypocrites than anyone I know. You're right to have that concern. And for where I or other Christians have made the gospel harder to believe, we want to repent of that. It also highlights, don't be confused that the behavior of Christians is the point of the gospel. When you see Christians behaving badly, it just proves how much we need a savior. And you're not going to have to hang out with me very long for me to prove how much I need a savior. And do you know what, if you're honestly yourself, you don't have to hang out with you for all that long to realize the Savior's truth of you. All of us stand on the level ground of brokenness and all of us can receive the level love of God. But the challenge to Christians in this text is to understand that the lives that we lead impact the reception of the gospel. We're called to have a disarming presence to live productive lives that the world will find attractive. So a few years ago, I'm in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and I'm out for a run. And I'm plodding along, you know, my unimpressive mile pace when suddenly it hits me, right? The smell of Krispy Kreme.

I called my brother and said, hey, do we have Krispy Kreme in Scotland? And he said, not only do we have Krispy Kreme in Scotland, when the Krispy Kreme in Edinburgh opened up, traffic got backed up all the way to the M8. Okay? So, you know, this is a good stat, actually. Most obese nation in the world, America. Second most obese nation, Scotland.

Let's go, right? Two nations united by a love of donuts, right? So I'm out on this run and suddenly the smell of Krispy Kreme hits me. And I run past it and I stop and I look at the sign. Now, do you know what the sign at Krispy Kreme says? Right? It says, hot now.

Right? Not hot earlier. Maybe not hot later. Hot now. Now is the time to eat donuts. And you can get a dozen for only \$7.99. Right? So the deal was done before I even went in.

[28 : 00] Right? Now, you can ask me how many donuts I ate and I will not tell you. Right? You know, the delicious, liquidy goodness of donuts that you can swallow whole. Yeah? Paul saying, that's what Christians are to be like in this world. We are to have a scent that stops people in their tracks. We are to have a scent that people find attractive. We are to have a scent that will actually cause people to come on in. A surprising scent that gives people pause for thought, that makes them stop and consider the sign even to come on in. And Paul says that we'll smell like that. We'll have that aroma of Christ when we start to live in joyful obedience. When we stop joining our colleagues and kind of ridiculing our boss, when we start to live peaceful, gentle, respectful lives instead of having to win every argument, when we model humility to our neighbors and love them as we've been loved. Paul's not naive. Okay? He's not saying all your neighbors are just going to fall at your feet and say, oh, you know, what must I do to be saved? But he is saying that that kind of life makes a difference. That that kind of life doesn't just make the gospel easier to believe. That kind of life is alluring to people as they see the difference that

Christ has made in our lives. It will stop them in their tracks. It will give them pause for thought and some of them will even come on in. And then the gospel and the gospel alone helps us understand the importance of how we live on earth. It's not legalism.

It's not license. It's not prosperity. Christians, we don't obey because if we don't, God will get us. We don't discard our lives because whatever happens, God will forgive us. No, we live lives of joyful obedience because God has so loved us. And as we run around busy from one thing to the next, may Jesus make us pause, that we would savor the delicacy of the freedom in life that he gives. And then, loved by Christ, we may start to live like Christ for our own joy, but also for the sake of our world. Amen. Let's pray together.

Father, we are here to celebrate the gospel that requires nothing of us in the front end and give us everything on the back end. A gospel that would require we do nothing in order to be saved because, Lord, that's the kind of gospel we need. We can't clean up our act. We are a mess. We're in need of grace, unmerited favor. And we thank you for giving it to us. And we thank you, Lord, that the gospel is so full, so complete, so robust that your work doesn't stop with our salvation, but is changing us even now here in time.

So Lord, help us to connect the dots from the gospel we believe to the life that we live. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.