

OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH

A Sermon for Sunday of the Passion, March 28, 2010

Text: Luke 22 and 23, the Passion Narrative

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:8)

After all the important words we have heard today, my remarks will not be the length of a sermon. I only want to highlight the good news in what is a very sad story.

The good news is, as Paul put it in his letter to the Christians of Philippi, that Jesus was *obedient to the point of death*.

His obedience consisted of listening. Listening to his Father in heaven.

And what was the Father telling him to do? Was he simply under orders, for example, to go and get killed?

No. The will of the Father is that his children should live.

Then what was Jesus hearing from above? A script that detailed where to go, where to stand, what to do and say?

No. Such a view demeans the humanity of Jesus; it would make him nothing but a robot.

Jesus was obedient in *this* sense: He was listening to what his Father wanted him to do. And what his Father wanted him to do was *to proclaim and inaugurate the kingdom of God*. To speak a word of truth by which God’s people might be restored to our rightful owner, and freed from all the other powers that want to destroy, imprison, degrade, and kill us—sin, death, the world, our flesh, principalities . . .

That is what the Father had always told Jesus. In fact, that is why the angel told Mary Jesus was to be born—to save his people from their sins. Everything he ever said or did was for this purpose. It was not only in the Garden of Gethsemane, but every step of the way, that Jesus prayed “not my will, but yours be done.”

But now, finally, Jesus was being obedient in an environment where that proclamation would not be tolerated. There in Jerusalem human authority combined with human sinfulness to produce resistance to God’s kingdom, his name, his will. It was Jerusalem, but Holy Week would not have gone any better for Jesus in any capital city, or any religious center, in the world.

That week, there was a battle royal between the proclaimed kingdom of God and all the powers of this world. Jesus was in a hurry to bring the kingdom of God—he didn’t want to eat another

meal until it was fulfilled. His opponents were panicking, lest the whole world run after Jesus. Tension was high. Would Jesus continue proclaiming the kingdom to the end, or would he cop a plea and settle on a farm in Nazareth?

Well, you heard how it ended. His last conversation was with a thief—go figure—who asked him to remember him when he came into his kingdom. As if! Yet with his last breath, right to the very point of death, Jesus obediently continued to proclaim the coming kingdom of God, saying “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

Then he commended himself to the Father to whom he had been listening so attentively, the Father whom he had obeyed in all things, and died. He couldn’t save *himself*, because that was not what he was born for.

Thus, in the final episode of *this* season (Lent) the powers of this world got their way. Jesus was proven *not* to be the Messiah *or* the Son of God by their killing him. That ought to settle it.

But did it?

“He who sits in the heavens laughs.”¹ Amen.



¹ Psalm 2:4.