

Luke 13:1-9 ESV

There was a man who bought a specially trained horse. It would respond to voice commands. But they were secret commands. The commands were secret so that not anyone could just command the horse, only the owner. The trainer was a Christian man, so he trained the horse to respond to Christian words. As it turned out, there were only two commands. In order to get the horse to move all you had to say was "Thank the Lord" To stop the Horse all you had to say was "Amen" So, the man thought that was pretty cool. So he bought the horse. He took the horse out into the local hills for a ride. He mounted the horse. Horse just sat there. The man gently said "thank the Lord" The horse started to trot. The man is amazed, what a smart horse. For kicks, he repeated "thank the Lord" the horse started to trot faster. The man is curious how fast the horse will go, so he continues to repeat "thank the Lord" "thank the Lord" "thank the Lord" Soon the horse is galloping full out. The man was exhilarated by the wind and speed. Suddenly he notices that they are heading toward towards the edge of a steep cliff. In panic, he pulls on the reins and says "whoa, horse!" "whoa" But the horse ignores him and continues to race forward. WHOA HORSE! screams the man, but the horse doesn't let up. The cliff is getting closer and closer. In fear, the man realizes he has forgotten the command to stop the horse. He was now close enough to discern the grass at the edge cliff. and they were still at full gallop. No more than 10 feet from the cliff the man remembers the command and screams out "Amen" and the horse screeches to a halt mere inches from the edge of the abyss. The man, still shaking from his ordeal, peers over the cliff. Realizing how close they were to death, he sits back into the saddle and lets out a sigh of relief and says "Thank the Lord."

The real lesson of the joke is that when you are barreling down toward trouble when life has you on an express train to destruction sometimes it's not enough to just stop. Because the very thing which had you moving toward trouble, just might start up again. For example, when the man on the horse, realized he didn't know how to stop, he should not panicked. The better solution would have been to pull on one of the reins and just turn the horse around.

You know this has a spiritual equivalent. It is an analogy to dealing with bad behavior. Sometimes just stopping bad behavior is not enough. because if you don't turn around (that is if you don't replace the bad behavior with good) it is very easy to start the bad behavior again, and you'll be in the same predicament, or maybe even worse, than before. It's not good enough to just stop bad behavior, you must turn around. When it comes to spiritual things, the act of turning around is called repentance. Repentance means "to turn around" In today's Gospel from

Luke, Jesus tells us that we need to repent. What does that mean? It is not enough to simply stop sinful behavior. We must turn around. We must replace bad behavior with good. We must replace sinful behavior with obedience... obedience to God.

Now considering Jesus' command... I wonder how I am doing in the obedience dept. Well, I figure the best rule of obedience with the Ten commandments. So, I look at myself and I figure, well I have no other Gods. I try to honor my parents I haven't stolen anything. I haven't killed anyone. So, I figure, I'm doing pretty well in the old "obedience" department. Feeling pretty good about myself... that is, until I started to study "what God really wants." The First Commandment You must not have other gods. What does this mean? As Martin Luther wrote in his catechism... We must fear, love, and trust God MORE than anything else. So. this means if I put my trust in anything else money power, intelligence other people myself anyone or anything else other than God then I have sinned. So, then I wonder have I really fully put my trust in God. in what ways have I allowed myself to become preoccupied with the gathering and protection, of the earthly treasures? Then I think of the Fourth Commandment. "You must honor your father and mother." What does this mean? Sure I honor my father and mother. But scripture tells us that there is more. To follow the fourth commandment, you must obey your mother and father and ALL AUTHORITIES above you, for God has placed them there for your protection. Yikes! Do I obey all authorities above me, as I would obey God? Do I willing obey all laws, even when no one is looking? Do I willing obey all laws while I am driving my car on the highways, even when no one is looking? If I do not, I have sinned. And then there is the Fifth Commandment "You must not kill." Surely, I haven't broken that! Well, what does God mean in the fifth commandment? Martin Luther writes, We must fear and love God, so that we will neither harm nor hurt our neighbor's body, but help him and care for him when he is ill. Oh, oh! I may not have actually committed murder, but have I really "helped and cared for my neighbor" when he is down? By these three alone, I'm questioning whether I am so great in the obedience department. In fact, if I am really honest with myself I realize that "perfect obedience" is as far away from me as the stars in the sky, and are about as easy to reach.

What is worse,... what is more damning... is the fact that, deep down inside, I may not even want to be perfectly obedient. I don't like to follow the 10 commandments. not always. and this kinda bothers me. This bothers me because, if I really think about it, I have to ask "How can God love me, when I am so imperfect? so sinful?" Anyone who is serious about their faith must come to grips

with this question. “How can God love me, when I am so disobedient, so imperfect, so sinful?”

Now some people try to side step the whole “obedience”: issue by invoking the Gudenoff Law. What is the Gudenoff Law? The Gudenoff Law says this... My obedience... while not perfect... is just Gudenoff. My obedience... while not perfect... is just “Good” “enough!” Sounds logical. Sounds logical, but it is totally wrong. You see, the truth is that God is perfect. and perfection cannot exist with imperfection. They are mutually exclusive. So, in reality our behavior, our sinful behavior is never “Good enough!” So, what are we to do? What are we to do?

The answer is that there is nothing WE DO. Simple “outward obedience” to God’s commands is not what God looks for, but rather He desires us to have a relationship with Him. He desires that we follow his commands because we want to please him, not because we fear him. This was an important distinction made in our gospel lesson because the Jews at the time had a misconception about salvation. They thought that they pleased God by simply following God’s laws. But rather, Jesus wanted them to know that righteousness did not come from following the letter of the law but rather following the spirit of the law. You see, the problem is that any time you live by the letter of the Law, there are always loopholes. The more you live by the letter of the law, the more it will be corrupted. Jesus was calling Israel not to obedience to the letter of the law, but obedience to the spirit of the law to true obedience which came from repentance.

Repentance. Turning around. Stop going the wrong way. Sounds good, but, “easier said than done.” I find that there are days when I find it hard to be obedient to God, to do the things which I know God wishes me to do. I find it is impossible to be perfectly obedient. If you are giving a sin up for Lent, you may be struggling with this very thing. The bible tells us exactly why that is so. The Bible tells us that it is our nature which makes it impossible for us to be perfectly obedient. Sexual immorality, the inability to forgive, greed covetousness... sin... are actually a basic part of our nature. Not only that but deep in our natural hearts, we have no desire to please God. Because of our sinful nature we were riding a horse headed for the cliff of Hell, and we didn’t know the command to “stop.”

However, God in his mercy did not leave us in this bad situation. He had a plan. God sent His Son Jesus to save us from our bad situation. Because He sent Jesus to suffer and die on a cross,... to be obedient when we were unable... Because of this, though we are still sinful, the door to a new relationship with God is open.

For those who have faith in Jesus, God has promised a special gift, The Holy Spirit. Obedience, true obedience is now possible because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell with us. The Holy Spirit, who empowers us, who brings faith for salvation, comes to us through God's powerful word. comes to you, bringing faith, and power to overcome sin. When you were baptized, God's powerful word came and freed you You were transformed from a child of sin into a child of God. Not only that but when you read the Bible. when you hear the word preached. God's Word comes with power. And when you receive them with an open heart God's word works within you. When we celebrate communion, the Holy Spirit comes down upon us and strengthens our faith empowering us to true obedience. We are a new creation.

But there is still a battle. For while we are still here on Earth, we still carry the sinful nature. But the battle is not between my sinful behavior and my will. It is not for me "to try harder" to be more obedient. The real battle is between my sinful nature and the Holy Spirit. You do battle with your sin NOT by fighting it, but rather by opening yourself to the work of the holy Spirit. So how do you open yourself to the work of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit comes to you through God's powerful word, in Baptism, in scripture received and studied and through Holy Communion. You heard that? You battle sin in your life not by "trying harder" to be more obedient. You do battle with your sin by opening yourself to the work of the Holy Spirit... the Holy Spirit who comes to you through God's powerful word, in Baptism, in Bible study and receiving Holy Communion. That's why we come here to worship, as often as possible. That's why we study the Bible as often as possible. That's why we come to the Lord's table. as often as possible. We are in battle with our sinful selves for the control of our bodies and actions, of our souls and minds. And it is here where we receive the strengthening of our faith to meet the needs of the week. Have faith that God will work within you. **As the Holy Spirit frees us from the sin which binds us we are free to see the love God has for us. As we think upon the love of God we will put it into practice True obedience will be a response born out of love.**

This is why our mission to share God's love, comfort and hope with all, with the people out there.... with the world.... is so important. The people of this world are waging a losing battle with sin. They are living only by the false Gudenoff Law, hoping that the pittance they can accomplish by their own power is "Good enough." Deep down inside, they know it is not enough. They are being beaten up by Satan. They need help. God is calling you to share the good news of Jesus Christ. One of the fruits of our relationship with Christ, is to bring out that same fruit in others. Go out and make friends with all who

have not heard of Jesus Christ. They need to hear about Him so badly and they are totally unaware of their need. Let them get to know you. As they get to know you, let them experience the love of Christ. Let them get to know Jesus through you. Teach them about the power of the Word of God. As they come the know Jesus, the Holy Spirit will bring forth the fruits of a relationship with God. the Holy Spirit will empower them in their battle with sin and Satan. The clarion call is NOT “retreat.” The clarion call is “charge.” “Thank the Lord.”