

Who Are You Going to Listen To?

by Peter Wintermote

KEY VERSE:

Acts 4:19-20

But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."

FAITH STORY:

Acts 4:1-22

FAITH FOCUS:

In this story the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees realized that Peter and John were proclaiming the Word to the people in the street. The members of the council arrested them and put them in custody until the next day. About 5000 of the people who heard the word believed. Peter and John stood in front of the council and, when questioned, they didn't back down from what they believed in. The council saw their boldness and that they were ordinary men, and realized they were friends of Jesus. The council didn't know what to do, so they threatened Peter and John and restricted them from speaking in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John asked if the right thing to do was take advice from the authorities rather than obeying and following God. They knew that they could not keep from opening their mouths and sharing what they had seen God do.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students understand that God's Word cannot be kept inside and silent but has to be shared with all people, even if it means disobeying the authorities (civil disobedience).

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles
- 2 Copies of "Here I am Lord" from Hymnal, A Worship Book, #395
- 3 Paper and pencils
- 4 Markers and large sheets of paper for each small group

FOCUS:

Greet students as they arrive.

Divide students into small groups and give each group a marker and large sheet of paper. Ask groups to make a list of at least ten situations when they believe it would be okay to disobey the law and people in authority.

Bring the groups together and discuss the lists.

CONNECT:

Look at the lists again. Circle each example in which disobedience of the law is based on a person's faith. Does being a Christian make a difference in a person's willingness to disobey the law? In what ways does it make a person MORE or LESS willing to disobey? Are Christians ever CALLED to disobey the law? When or why?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Read Acts 4:1-22.

Break into small groups and give the following assignments (more than one group can do the same assignment if necessary.)

Group 1: Find out how many times the council punished Peter and John. Why did they continue to talk about God when they were making people mad?

Group 2: Look up Romans 13:1. How does this verse relate to civil disobedience? Is it okay or is not okay to disobey the authorities? How do you decide?

Group 3: Read I Peter 2:13-18. What does this say about respecting God and authorities? What does it say about civil disobedience?

Group 4: Look up Daniel 6:6-17. How does Daniel break the law? Why?

Gather the small groups back together and have each group report back on their assignments. Here is a summary for each group and what they might have found:

Group 1: The council punished Peter and John four times. The first time the council got annoyed and arrested Peter and John. The second time they had to stand in front of the high priest and many others as prisoners for a questioning. Then Peter and John were ordered not to spread the Word anymore and the last time was when they were threatened by the council.

Group 2: In Romans 13:1, we read that God wants us to obey the laws of the authorities, but we also have to obey what God has told us. The laws and other people sometimes interfere with what

God has told us to do. It is a tough decision to make, whether breaking the law is okay sometimes.

Group 3: God tells us that it is important to follow the authorities and the law, but we should live as free people. If we see the law going against our faith, we have to go with God, not the law.

Group 4: All the people are ordered by the king not to pray or talk about God for thirty days. Daniel knows it is wrong to not continue praying, so he goes to his house and prays three times a day to God. Men found him praying and brought him to the King and he was thrown into the lions den. Daniel did do the right thing and continued praying because he knew it was the right thing to do even if it was forbidden by the law.

SUMMARIZE:

- Peter and John stood firm in preaching God's word even after getting arrested.
- Christians need to stand up for what we believe in no matter what.
- Sometimes God calls us to disobey the law when God's Word is in conflict with the law.

APPLY:

Ask these questions:

- How can we apply this story to our lives today?
- Who are some modern-day people who have stood up for what they believed in?
- How have Anabaptists disobeyed the law because they were standing up for what they believed?
- Have you ever had the opportunity to tell someone about God? Did you do it? Why or why not?

Optional: View the video "The Radicals" or other films about Christians standing up for their beliefs as part of this session or at another time.

RESPOND:

Go around the group and have each person say what they discovered or learned from the lesson. Then have each person say what they feel God is saying to them and how they should act or live differently. (If someone doesn't want to share, just move on to the next person.) Pass out the copies of "Here I am Lord" from the Hymnal, #395. Use this as your prayer.