

Why Did Jesus say, "Don't Tell?"

Tom Stephens

Question: In Matthew 16:20, Peter said Jesus was the Christ, Jesus told Peter and the other disciples not to tell anyone. Why didn't He want them to tell people about Him?

Answer: First we look at the context. In the 16th Chapter of Matthew, Jesus had been teaching His disciples the danger of trusting the Pharisees and the Sadducees. As usual, the disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant when He mentioned the "leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," and they believed He spoke of leavened bread.

Jesus continued His teaching by asking the disciples "Whom do men say I am?" They gave a variety of responses. Then Jesus asked, "..whom say ye that I am?" Peter responded first, saying: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

*"Blessed art thou Simon of Barjona, flesh has not revealed this truth to you, but My Father in heaven." Jesus answered, then added: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ**" (Matt. 16:18-20).*

This was followed in chapter 17 by the transfiguration experience where Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to the top of a high mountain They watched in amazement as Jesus was transfigured and was joined by Elijah and Moses:

*"And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, **Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead**" (Mt. 17:9).*

Therefore, the key to the question, "Why did Jesus say, don't tell" is the Resurrection!

First, the disciples were still unlearned and ignorant men, at least about the things concerning our Lord. Much of the time they did not realize the truths of His teachings, and that would not change until Jesus blew the breath of life into His disciples on the day of His resurrection. On that day, Jesus said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost", and the work finished from the foundations of the earth showed forth its glory in the form of salvation to the followers of Jesus Christ.

Very shortly after this, Jesus said to His disciples, *"These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. **And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.**"* Luke 24:44, 45.

Then and *only* then, did they become regenerated men able to fully understand everything they had seen and heard as they followed Jesus.

"And they beheld His glory!"

Second, though Peter had just declared Jesus as the "Christ, the Son of the living God", he had no concept Jesus would shed His blood on the cross and be raised on the third day. Neither did he understand by His death and resurrection, Jesus would fulfill the Old Covenant sacrifices to bring true salvation to mankind.

What they did understand is that their Master, who loved them with an unconditional love, appeared on this earth and did many miraculous things according to the Old Covenant scripture. The disciples had no real revelation of 'Christ', and they had no clue whatsoever what their future would be. These men were not ready to be trusted with the tender things of the Lord.

And third, Jesus knew it was not time for the disciples to teach the truths which would soon come to the infant body of believers called "the Church".

In forbidding them to tell others Jesus was the Christ and in forbidding them to share the wonders of the transfiguration, Jesus was obviously constraining them until a future time when they would understand the significance of His life and death and revelation would be freely given to all who earnestly seek the Lord.

Revelations come to men who have a relationship with their Savior.

In a different context than the previous example, as written in Luke 5, a leper approached the Master, saying, "Lord, if are willing, You can make me clean." If there were ever any doubt as to Jesus' willingness to heal, it was settled right then. "I am willing; be cleansed," replied the Saviour. And in compassion, He did something no one ever did — He reached out and touched the leper. "And He charged him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.'" The issue here was not one of obedience to Jesus but rather of obedience to the law as given in the book of Leviticus. If a leper believed himself healed, he must show himself to the priest and if indeed, the leprosy was gone, there were certain cleansing rituals and sacrifices that must be made (See Leviticus 14).

Keep Your Enthusiasm in Check!

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. (Mark 1:43- 45; also Mt. 16:20).

A man full of leprosy came to Jesus, begging Jesus for compassion. Jesus did more than speak healing to him. He touched the man and in so doing Jesus rendered himself unclean under the law of Moses.

The law of the leper (Leviticus 13 and 14) taught that the unclean contaminated the clean. But, Jesus brought a new way. He decontaminated the contaminated by healing them.

The leper was beside himself with joy. Understandably so!

Then, Jesus gave him a seemingly totally illogical command, "Don't tell anyone!" Evidently the healing took place without a crowd milling around. Had more people known, they would have quickly spread the word. No, this was a private encounter between the leper and Jesus.

How could Jesus expect the leper to restrain himself from telling such good news? Shouldn't the Lord have permitted him to immediately express enthusiasm?

Jesus knew ahead of time the result of the man's obedience or disobedience. Jesus always knows more about the future than we do, and that's why it's important for us to obey Him even when we don't feel like it, or when our emotions or thinking disagrees with Him!

Look at the consequences of the healed leper's disobedience.

First, he broke the Old Testament law that provided for a time period of cleansing and restoration to society. In so doing, he jeopardized his return to normalcy because he had not been properly certified as clean by the priest. He violated God's Word through his enthusiasm.

Second, he missed the opportunity for the priesthood to validate the healing Jesus performed. The official validation of the priestly system on the healing work of Jesus would have been a genuine headache to those who later sought to destroy the Lord.

Third, Jesus was forced to change His itinerary. It took eight days to validate the cleanness of a former leper (Leviticus 14:10). Those extra eight days would have provided freedom of movement for Jesus within towns and villages. Instead, Jesus had to avoid going into population centers.

Fourth, others were inconvenienced. If the man had obeyed, there would have been no need for the multitudes to trek out to lonely places where Jesus taught and healed. Jesus would have ministered in their hometowns.

The healed leper did not take the Lord seriously. The Lord asked him to do something counter to his feelings. His emotions took over from his volition. The disease of leprosy had not resisted the Lord's command of "Be clean!" But, the man himself resisted the Lord's orders, "Do not tell."

If the Lord asks you to do something that doesn't seem to make sense, do it anyway! He always has the better idea!

Prayer of Response:

"Lord Jesus, I am full of good intentions, but You have all wisdom. May I always and instantly obey what You tell me to do."

The above portion of this teaching, beginning with the title, *"Keep Your Enthusiasm in Check"*, was contributed by: GEORGE O. WOOD is general superintendent of the Assemblies of God. Visit On Your Mark at tpe.ag.org for a link to On Your Mark video and audio podcasts with Dr. George O. Wood.

Therefore, in today's terms, you would be encouraged by the Holy Spirit to, First, obey what Christ tells you, then go and get confirmation from medical doctor/s as confirmation to your healing — *then* give all the glory to God!

Some speculate Jesus was using a type of "reverse psychology" and really expected the man to tell everyone. However, that would not be in keeping with the nature of Jesus, who embodies the spirit of truth. The Jesus revealed in the Bible would never say anything He didn't mean.

Rather this issue becomes an issue of obedience.

Remember Samuel the prophet wrote, "*obedience is better than sacrifice.*" For Samuel walked in God's honor, integrity, and righteousness his entire life.

Samuel might be called a "miracle baby." His father was Elkanah; his mother, Hannah.

Hannah called her son Samuel because "*I have asked him of the Lord.*"

Elkanah went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah determined since she was still nursing her son, she would not attend till the child was weaned. At that time, she would take the small child to appear before the Lord and to permanently abide in the Temple.

So Samuel's was a Godly family. They did all things right by God's standards, and little Samuel even ministered unto the Lord before Eli, the Priest. (1 Samuel 3:9).

"And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD" (1 Samuel 3:19-21).

If you didn't get everything revealed in this verse, please read it again. All little boys grow — too fast, I might add. Here's the difference with Samuel. He .."*let none of his words fall to the ground.*"

Little boys get into things, and in this age, many never quite settle down. You even hear vain ramblings from their lips; and worse when they begin talking. They are in your hair every minute because they have learned possessions are theirs for the asking. They grow up alright...many on probation...then in prison. But...

Samuel never, really never, according to the Word of God, let anything...not one single word...leave his lips unfiltered by the Father. Holy Spirit filled men of God should be able to proclaim that kind of righteousness in their lives! And if you can imagine it with me, Samuel had a focus that equaled the Apostle Paul's determination to set his goal for eternal things of God. Samuel honored the Lord in his obedience to the Lord, and obedience will always earn us a place with God.

Samuel understood ahead of time the words spoken by the Lord Jesus concerning the tongue: *"anything more than yea or nay comes of evil."*

James spoke of the dangers of a flapping tongue in his book. He spent the entire third chapter on the subject of talking foolishly and having no wisdom.

But Samuel was established...planted in God. He was so thoroughly grounded in his God that *"all Israel knew Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."*

Like Samuel I say obedience is better than sacrifice. Because Jesus sacrificed Himself for us, He expects something from us. That something is given in Romans 12:1-3: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect, will of God_ For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."*

That man whom Jesus told to keep silence, simply put, may have disobeyed.

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Jesus knew His disciples and the man he healed had great potential to be men much like Samuel. If they could keep a quiet and calm spirit, and refuse to allow unfiltered messages to leave their lips, then maybe they would receive the anointing to do their part in *'destroying the works of the devil'*.

On the other hand, if they could not hold their silence in crucial times, maybe, just maybe, the Holy Spirit would not be able to anoint them as He desired. That's more punishment than I want to even think about.

Christ's love for you is both unconditional and eternal.

Blessings to you!
Tom Stephens