

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO FAITH

LUKE 5:1-15

Since Faith Is The Only Way To Unleash God's Power Into Our Lives, We Must Be Careful To Overcome All The Obstacles That Prevent Us From Exercising Our Faith.

I. Apathy (Vs 1-3)

Being So Caught Up In Worldly Pursuits Often Takes Up So Much Of Our Time And Energy, That We Don't Have Time To Think About The Things Of God.

- A. Taking An Interest In God's Word (1)
- B. Faith Unlocks The Door To God's Work (2-3)

II. Pride And Arrogance (Vs 4-11)

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- A. A Shaky Response To An Invitation (4-5)
- B. Faith Unlocks The Door To God's Incredible Response (6-7)
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Fear Of Rejection And Fear Of The Unknown Often Keeps Us From Receiving God's Incredible Blessings.

- A. A Courageous Act Of Faith (12)
- B. Faith Unlocks The Door To God's Touch (13)
- C. Becoming A Living Witness For God (14-15)

IV. Summary

Overcoming Obstacles To Faith

(Luke 5:1-15)

Last time we met, we saw that Jesus received this incredible welcome and response in the city of Capernaum. Whereas His hometown wanted to kill Jesus and couldn't wait to get rid of Him, the people in Capernaum begged Him to stay. They loved Jesus and fell in love with Him. As we study through the Gospel of Luke, let's keep this in mind. We tend to focus on the Jewish leaders who hate Him and want Him dead. From that, we assume that Jesus was hated by the Jews. That simply is not true. Many, like the people in Capernaum, loved Him. I think that is something that we need to remember. We look at the world in which we live, and we start to feel that everybody hates Jesus. That is simply not the case. All sorts of people around the world love Jesus.

Jesus told the people in Capernaum that He had to go to all the towns in Judea and preach the Good News. It seems as if many people followed Him because we see Jesus in today's passage just a few miles away perhaps in a neighboring town preaching and teaching. In this morning's text, Jesus hooks up with some fisherman. I started to think about Jesus choosing fishermen. Are they really the most reliable people when it comes to telling stories? After all, aren't fishermen famous for exaggerating, twisting, and bending the truth? In fact, aren't they somewhat notorious for lying? I have some very close friends who are serious fishermen. They really do go to work only to support their fishing habits.

Believe me; I've had my share of interesting encounters with fishermen as a pastor. For example, a young boy came to Sunday School late. I knew that he was usually very prompt and asked him if anything was wrong. The boy replied no, that he was going fishing but his dad told him that he needed to go to church. I was very impressed and asked the boy if his dad had explained to him that it was more important to go to church than to go fishing? The boy replied, "Yes he did ... Dad said he didn't have enough bait for both of us."

At any rate, I think it is very interesting that Jesus chose to get hooked up with fishermen.

As I studied through this morning's passage, I started to think that this passage was all about faith. We said last time that faith is what opens the door for God to work in our lives. The author of Hebrews said that it is impossible to please God without faith. We can see that the crowd exercises their faith by listening to Jesus preach and teach the Word of God. Peter exercises faith by obeying Jesus' command to fish. The leper exercised his faith by asking Jesus to heal him.

I. APATHY

However, the more I thought about the passage, it seems to be about people who overcome obstacles to their faith. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **SINCE FAITH IS THE ONLY WAY TO UNLEASH GOD'S POWER INTO OUR LIVES, WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO OVERCOME ALL THE OBSTACLES THAT PREVENT US FROM EXERCISING OUR FAITH.** We will see that people have to overcome apathy, pride, arrogance, fear, and hopelessness in order to exercise their faith. As we study through this text, let us examine ourselves to make sure that nothing is stopping us from exercising our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Sometimes I think we tend to assume that the problems we face are much different than the problems people faced 2,000 years ago during the lifetime and ministry of Christ. However, just like in our time, the people of Jesus' day had to overcome apathy as described in verses 1-3. **BEING SO CAUGHT UP IN WORLDLY PURSUITS OFTEN TAKES UP SO MUCH OF OUR TIME AND ENERGY, THAT WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE THINGS OF GOD.**

Taking An Interest In God's Word (1)

A rather common attitude towards faith issues is that we take care of all our personal business. Then whatever time, energy, and money we have left over, we think about applying these to faith endeavors. In other words, we tend to give our leftovers to God. Since most people are so busy, we find ourselves apathetic towards matters of faith. But in verse 1, we encounter a group of people who are very engaged with Jesus and taking an interest in God's Word. We see that He has not traveled far. He traveled from Capernaum down to the seashore. The lake is referred to here as Gennesaret. Gennesaret is a region on the Sea of Galilee. This body of water is referred to by both names in the Bible. The Sea of Galilee is about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. They are up along the northwestern shore. And the text says that people were crowding around Jesus, listening to the Word of God. The way Luke uses the word logos in his gospel is interesting. From last time, you will remember that he used the word logos to describe the content of Jesus' teaching. Here the people were listening to the logos. The Gospel of John identified Jesus as the living Word of God. So Jesus is the Word of God and He teaches the Word of God. The people in these two cities seem to be captivated by Jesus' teaching, His miracles, and His person. They were taken by the whole experience of Jesus. It almost seems as if you were to put last week's text and this text together, that people just stopped their everyday routines to get a chance to spend some time with Jesus. There was no apathy among this crowd. They wanted Jesus and they crowded around Him. I want that to be a description of my life. I want to be totally captivated by God, His Person, His Presence, and His Work.

Faith Unlocks The Door To God's Work (2-3)

These people did not let apathy stand in their way. In verses 2-3 we can see that their faith unlocked the door to God's Work. The simple story is that Jesus saw two boats. They belonged to Simon. He asked Simon if he would be so kind to row Him out a little ways so he could address and teach the crowd. Peter agreed and these people actually got to sit down and listen to Jesus, the long awaited Promised Messiah, God in the flesh teach them about the mysteries of life. I want to encourage all of us that if we are willing to sit down and read our Bibles; God will show us and explain to us the mysteries of life.

Now let's go back for a few details. The boats are empty because the fishermen had finished fishing. They are now washing and drying their fishing nets. This is a lot of hard work. They have to make sure they are cleaned and dried properly so they do not rot or decay.

Secondly, Jesus already knows Simon because He healed Simon's mother-in-law and ate lunch at his house. So Jesus seems to have His eye on Peter.

Thirdly, Luke refers to this guy as Simon, Peter, and Simon Peter. However, Jesus doesn't give him the name Peter until chapter 9.

So the upshot of this section is that people were captivated by Jesus, the Living Word of God, and by Jesus' teaching, the written and spoken Word of God. If we expose people to the Word of God, they will be captured. In other words, my job week after week is to preach the Word of God. My job is not to comment on current events or to give you some psychological self-help techniques. My job is to introduce people to Jesus and His teaching. Jesus is the Living Word of God. The Bible is the written Word of God. Our job as believer is simply to bring people to Jesus and to introduce Him. God The Holy Spirit will do the rest. But as Christians, we must live our lives in such a way that we awaken the people around us from their apathy towards religious pursuits. We can only do that if we have escaped from our attraction to the world. BEING SO CAUGHT UP IN WORLDLY PURSUITS OFTEN TAKES UP SO MUCH OF OUR TIME AND ENERGY, THAT WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE THINGS OF GOD. Let's purpose now to be living examples of people who were caught by The Word of God.

II. PRIDE AND ARROGANCE

Another obstacle that prevents us from exercising our faith is our pride and arrogance as demonstrated in verses 4-11. ALTHOUGH WE WOULDN'T WANT TO SAY THIS OUT LOUD, SOMETIMES WE THINK WE KNOW WHAT'S BETTER FOR US THAN GOD DOES.

Christians who date and marry non Christians think they know more about marriage than God does. People that grumble and complain think they know more about life than God does. People that make up their own rules for living and make up their own idea of religion or Christianity think they more about right and wrong than God does. Whenever we fail to submit to the plain teachings of Scripture, we are acting as if we are smarter than God.

A Shaky Response To An Invitation (4-5)

In verses 4-5 Peter gives a shaky response to an invitation by Jesus to go fishing. Jesus had been teaching the crowd, but now Jesus telescopes His attention on Peter. After teaching the crowds, Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Let's go fishing." Now keep this in mind. He, James, John, and probably Andrew spent all night fishing. They had laboriously cleaned their nets and hung them to dry. They are tired and now Jesus wants to go fishing.

Peter reminds Jesus that he is the expert fisherman and Jesus' expertise is carpentry and teaching. If they decide to go fishing, it will mean that they have to get the nets, dirty them, and when they get back in again, they'll have to wash them and hang them all over again.

Add to that, fishing in the Sea of Galilee was done at night. That was when the best fishing was done. Peter had to start thinking whether this would all be worth it or not. After thinking it over and giving Jesus the benefit of his expertise Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the Master and that if He wants to go fishing, Peter will take Him.

Peter heard Jesus teach in Capernaum and he saw Jesus heal many people, including his mother-in-law. He heard Jesus teach the people here all day. So even though Peter knows there are no

fish to be caught, he feels weighing all the evidence, that Jesus deserves a shot. He addresses Jesus as Lord. But this word for Lord is not the typical *kyrios*. The word Peter uses here is *epistateis*. Luke seems to use this word to translate the Hebrew word for Rabbi. However, this word can also be used to describe a person of authority like a commander or the captain of a ship. So here, in faith, Peter turns over his ship to be captained by Jesus. Against all conventional wisdom and every instinct in Peter's body, he turned over command of his ship to Jesus. He said to Jesus, "I'll do this because You asked me to."

You know there will be many times we don't feel like doing what Jesus commands us to do. People have wronged us and we don't want to forgive them. We are angry for good reason and we don't want to let it go. We don't feel like being sexually pure in mind, thought, and body. We don't feel like paying our taxes. Nevertheless, we must remember Who captains our ship. Jesus is the Lord of our lives, and even though we don't feel like doing the right thing, we must act out in faith and obey God.

Faith Unlocks The Door To God's Incredible Response (6-7)

Again, let me point this out as we study through the Gospel. Verses 6-7 illustrate to us the truth that faith unlocks the door to God's incredible response to us. Peter obeyed Jesus in faith and look what happened. They lowered the nets and there were so many fish in the net, Peter couldn't pull up the net. He signaled for his partners. They immediately got in the other boat, went out to help and pulled in so many fish, that both boats actually started to sink from all the weight. Can you imagine the chaos and excitement as they frantically rowed to shore, sinking the whole way? There was so much blessing that came so fast, things were in chaos. This was wonderful chaos.

Look, I'm not promising you worldly wealth, worldly fame, worldly power, or worldly happiness. What I am promising you is this. If you will dare to submit your own thinking, logic, reasoning, and pride to God in even the smallest expression of faith, Jesus will jump in with both feet and your world will be in wonderful chaos. But the trick is that we must be willing to give up anything that stands between us and our relationship with God. Remember, that's Luke's definition of being poor. Anything that prevents us from receiving God's incredible blessings is the thing that's making us poor. I'm begging all of us to understand this. There is nothing in this world or the next that is worth hanging on to if it is keeping us from receiving God's blessings.

An Increased Response Of Faith (8-10a)

And then verses 8 through the first half of verse 10 we are reminded of the principle of when we exercise a little faith and we see how God responds to that, we are all prepared to exercise an increased response of faith. Please pay attention to the wording here. Peter did submit his expertise, his pride, and his boat to Jesus. Even though he did it half-believing, he did submit to Christ and obey Him. Christ rewarded that faith with a miraculous catch of fish. Now even though Peter submitted to Jesus better than most of us, he still responds to the miracle in a repentant way. Peter fell at Jesus' knees which is a sign of worship. Realizing he is in the presence of holiness, Peter says to Jesus, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" In view of Jesus' magnificent response to Peter's pathetic act of faith, Peter is now ashamed at his puny act of faith.

Peter is a healthy model for us in overcoming our pride and arrogance. If we were Peter, we would have been patting ourselves on the back thinking that we deserved this miraculous catch of fish. After all, we lent Jesus our boat, and even though we thought Jesus' idea was stupid, we did submit to His will and take Him out fishing. We are entitled to this catch.

And that's why we have so much trouble with living out our Christianity. If we truly understood what Jesus did on our behalf, there is no act of faith great enough to justify the blessings God sends our way. Every time we kneel to pray and speak the words, "In the Name of Jesus," we should fall down like Peter and tremble that God would take our pathetic act of faith and allow us into His presence. I have heard it all from the mouths of people who call themselves Christians. They say, "I serve in the church," as if that's a good work God ought to stand up and take notice of. The fact is, we are supposed to be serving in church. In fact, not to serve in church is a sin. Others say, "I give a tenth of all my income to the church," as if Jesus should stand up and take notice of this. We are supposed to be giving a tenth of all our income to church. In fact, according to Jesus' standards, we ought to be giving way above 10 %. People say, "I'm a good neighbor, a good family man, a good citizen," as if that ought to earn them some favor with God. Jesus told us we are supposed to love our enemies, pray for our enemies, and feed our enemies. Anything we find ourselves thinking that we deserve some credit for an act, please apply Jesus' standards to the act and see if we still deserve credit or not. The truth is this. When we receive blessings from God as a direct act of our faith, we should be driven to our knees in fear and wonder that Jesus would even bother to respond to pathetic people like us and our pathetic acts of faith.

Look who else was involved in this miracle. James and John, the sons of Zebedee. We know that Jesus picks these three plus Peter's brother Andrew to be among His 12 original disciples. Fishing partners they were; Peter, Andrew, James, John, and now Jesus. I dare you to make Jesus the senior partner in your life and the captain of your soul. You will consistently be astonished to watch Him work. But we must open the door in faith.

Faith Unlocks The Door To God's Incredible Plan (10b-11)

What happens next is even more incredible. The second half of verse 10 through verse 11 demonstrates further that faith unlocks the door to God's incredible plan for our lives. Even though Jesus addresses Peter alone, He is actually talking to him as a representative of the three. Jesus encourages Simon not to be afraid. In Luke so far, the only being to speak these words were angelic beings. Now we have Jesus speaking these words to the fishermen. Please watch this formula as well. Jesus blesses us so that we can in turn be blessings to others. The first people Jesus drafts into Messianic Kingdom service are three simple fishermen. These men were not scholars or teachers. They were not well educated. They owned a fishing business. What was it about them that attracted Jesus to them? They were willing to set their doubts and fears aside in order to listen to, submit to, and follow Him in faith. We don't have to have seminary or college degrees. In fact, it could be argued that oftentimes these keep us from following God.

And now Jesus did the unthinkable. He took these fishermen, and commissioned them as the first officers in His kingdom. We will see as we go through the Gospel of Luke that Peter, James, and John for Jesus' intimate inner circle. It doesn't matter if you are educated, wealthy, powerful, talented, or none of these. Jesus is simply looking for men and women who are willing to listen to Him, submit to His Lordship, and follow Him in faithful obedience.

I think it's important to recognize how God works in our individual lives. Jesus took these fishermen fishing and provided them with a catch like they had never experienced before. And then He went on to tell them they would be catching men and women for the Kingdom of God. Now the word for catch is zogran. To be sure it can mean to catch fish. But it also has almost a lifeguard definition to it as well. It means to rescue from danger. Just like they could have ever imagined they could ever catch that many fish, especially in the daytime, they would now assist Jesus in rescuing people from the oppression and prisons that keep them from recognizing that Jesus came to set people free. They would be rescuing people from the fires of hell, from their slavery to sin, and their fears of death. Jesus calls you and me to that very same mission. We are lifeguards and the life vest we are throwing to people is Jesus. When was the last time you told someone about the saving power of Jesus? I have always prayed that Devon Church would be a place where tons of people find salvation. If we take our callings seriously as individuals and as a church body, God will fill our nets beyond belief. Let us pray and work to make this place and our lives places where people hear and respond to God's offer of grace and salvation. But that would require us to give up our pride, arrogance, fears, and any notion that we know better than God. Let us remove the chains from our own lives first. **ALTHOUGH WE WOULDN'T WANT TO SAY THIS OUT LOUD, SOMETIMES WE THINK WE KNOW WHAT'S BETTER FOR US THAN GOD DOES.**

III. FEAR AND HOPELESSNESS

Apathy makes us poor. Pride and arrogance make us poor. In other words, apathy, pride, and arrogance prevent us from exercising our faith in Jesus. Fear and hopelessness are added to that list in verses 12-15. **FEAR OF REJECTION AND FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN OFTEN KEEPS US FROM RECEIVING GOD'S INCREDIBLE BLESSINGS.** One thing that I have observed over the years is that even though people are miserable where they are at in life, they often find it hard to change. I will ask them, "what are you really risking to let go of this situation and follow Jesus in faith?" Their response is fear. They will often say, "Yes, I am miserable, but I know this misery." Many people don't follow Jesus because they are afraid where He will lead them. If you look back at verse 11, Peter and the boys, pulled up the nets, parked the boats, left them all behind, and followed Jesus. Jesus didn't reject them. They risked an act of faith, and Jesus recruited them as officers in the Kingdom. Here is another comforting thing about Jesus. The disciples consistently make bone headed decisions and say and do a lot of stupid things. Yes, Jesus has to correct them, but Jesus never rejected them. The Bible promises that those who come to Jesus in faith will not be rejected. The trick is that we have to boldly come to Him in faith.

A Courageous Act Of Faith (12)

Verse 12 describes a courageous act of faith. Lepers were social, physical, and religious outcasts. They were not allowed to come in contact with people who were not infected. In fact, as they got close to people, they were required to yell out to stay away that they had leprosy. But this guy, instead of shouting out to stay away, he approached Jesus. He ran right up to Jesus, fell down and worshipped and begged Jesus to heal him. Now look at this incredible faith of the leper. He does not question if Jesus could heal him. He was convinced that Jesus could heal him. His doubt was if Jesus was willing to heal an outcast. You see, this guy's disease made

him poor. He wasn't allowed to worship at the temple nor was he allowed to participate in any religious service. Did God hate him? Is that why he had leprosy? This guy figured he had nothing to lose. Listen to the faith statement he makes that will open the door to Jesus. "Lord, if You are willing, you can make me clean."

I don't care where you find yourself this morning. I don't care how bad you think you are or others think you are. If you want to find the abundant life in Christ, put your fears aside and embrace Him this morning. Tell Him you have sinned. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins. Ask Him to touch you and make you whole. And then ask Him to come into your life and make Him the Captain of your soul. What do you have to lose? Nothing. What do you have to gain?

Faith Unlocks The Door To God's Touch (13)

Well as verse 13 points out faith unlocks the door to God's touch. You stand to gain everything. Then it happened. Jesus reached out and touched the untouchable. According to Jewish religious law, touching a leper made you unclean as well. The general principle in the Bible was that when something clean came in contact with something dirty, the clean thing became dirty as well. Only in this case, Jesus reversed all the conventional wisdom. Jesus' perfectly clean touch healed the leper. Notice, Jesus did not make a spectacle. He simply touched the man and said to him, "I am willing. Be clean!" Immediately the man was clean. I believe this with all my heart. All any of us need is a touch and a kind word from Jesus. Jesus simply touched Peter's mother-in-law and spoke the fever out of her. When I look at all the people who do not want to embrace Christianity, I ask myself, "Who wouldn't want to hear a word from Jesus and be touched by Him?"

Becoming A Living Witness For God (14-15)

And in verses 14-15 we find that if we dare put aside our fears and let Jesus touch us and speak to us, we will become living witnesses for God. Again Jesus told him not to tell anyone. Jesus does not want to become a freak show nor does He want overly zealous Jews getting crazy and starting a rebellion. Jesus has a particular timetable in mind. However, Jesus does tell the guy to go to the temple, show himself to the priest and offer up the appropriate sacrifices. In Jewish law, only the priest had the authority to pronounce a person clean and fit to rejoin the social and religious community. Actually the great High Priest had already pronounced the man clean, but in order to rejoin his community, he had to submit to the inspection of the temple priest.

Here is the short version of the sacrifices. Two birds were brought to the priest. One bird was killed and the blood caught in a bowl. The other bird was dipped in the blood of the first bird, then set free to fly away. Then the healed person was sprinkled with blood 7 times with the blood. After a 7-day inspection period, on the 8th day the person was required to sacrifice 2 lambs or 1 lamb and 2 doves for people who couldn't afford 2 lambs.

IV. SUMMARY

Listen, we were all born as outcasts from God's Kingdom. We were all spiritual lepers. We will see later in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus is the One Who was slaughtered. We are dipped in the

blood of Christ. We are set free and we are the ones who fly away in freedom. Have you been washed in the blood of Jesus? I don't know what may be holding you back and I certainly don't know what you may be afraid of. But I am encouraging you this morning to put your fears aside and receive Jesus. This man was healed and when he went to the priest, he would have had to tell him that Jesus was the One Who touched him and healed him. Word spread around. Every time one of this guy's family or friends asked him how he was healed, cleansed, and made whole, he would have to tell them about Jesus. And that's the way it ought to be for those of us who have been touched by Jesus. Our lives should be living testimonies to God power and love. But alas, **FEAR OF REJECTION AND FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN OFTEN KEEPS US FROM RECEIVING GOD'S INCREDIBLE BLESSINGS.**

I know this sounds incredible even as it comes out of my mouth. But there will be people who remain alienated from Jesus because of apathy, pride, arrogance fear, and hopelessness. Jesus is the answer to all of our needs and wants. **SINCE FAITH IS THE ONLY WAY TO UNLEASH GOD'S POWER INTO OUR LIVES, WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO OVERCOME ALL THE OBSTACLES THAT PREVENT US FROM EXERCISING OUR FAITH.**

Usually the source of all our faulty thinking comes from accepting worldly values and judgments. "Fred Astaire was without dispute one of the top singers, dancers, and actors of all time. In Top hat, Swing Time, Holiday Inn, and other famous movies, he danced and crooned his way into people's hearts worldwide.

But in 1932, when Astaire was just starting out, a Hollywood talent judge wrote on his screen test: 'Can't act. Can't sing. Can dance a little.'" (source unknown)

Satan and the world have placed all sorts of things in our lives that keep us poor; apathy, pride, arrogance, fear, and hopelessness. They want us to remain their prisoners. They want to continue to oppress us, and keep us blind. But Jesus came to set us free and give us abundant and exciting lives.