

Success Comes Through... (Luke 5:1-11)

- If I were to ask you that question, “where does success come from,” how you answer?
 - Would you have different answers for different situations?
 - Do you already know, or would you have to think about it for a while?
 - How many of you would include “giving up everything” in your definition?
- I think before we go any further we should have some sort of workable definition of success, so I’m going to give it a shot:
 - “Success comes through following God.”
 - There you go. Sermon over. Go in peace everyone!
 - ...
 - You may be thinking at this point, “Sure, David, take the easy answer...”
 - But, first, is it easy? And, second, is it inaccurate?
 - Is there any situation, relationship or context in your life that would not work **best** if you were simply “following God?”
 - And, then, do we need to define “following God?”
 - I should hope not.
 - He’s given us many ways of determining what it takes to follow Him:
 - Scripture
 - Prayer
 - Holy Spirit
 - Church
 - Friends (good, Godly friends)
- Our text for today is Luke 5:1-11 and there we find a good outline for what it takes to have success.
- Let’s read it first:

5 One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee,^[a] great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. ²He noticed two

empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³ Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon,^[b] its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

⁵ "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." ⁶ And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! ⁷ A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

⁸ When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man." ⁹ For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. ¹⁰ His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" ¹¹ And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

- Within this passage we'll find that success comes through

- Practicing an attractive faith
- Practicing deep obedience
- Practicing acute self-awareness
- Practicing extravagant self-denial

- First is practicing an attractive faith

- If **ever** there was a phrase **full** of landmines it's a phrase like "attractive faith."
 - Let me defuse some of those landmines first.

- “Attractive faith” is **not** compromising so the world doesn’t get their feelings hurt.
 - “Attractive faith” is **not** glazing over or affirming behavior the Bible says is wrong.
 - “Attractive faith” is presenting something, through your life, that looks better than what the world has to offer.
 - It is presenting something, through your life, that fills that “God-shaped hole” that exists in every person.
- Luke opens the passage telling us, “*great crowds pressed in on Him [Jesus] to listen to the word of God.*”
- We know that Jesus worked miracles.
 - He healed the blind
 - He made the lame walk
 - He raised the dead
- But notice that Luke doesn’t say here, “great crowds pressed in on Him to see a miracle or two.”
- No, he says the crowds followed Jesus, “*to listen to the word of God.*”
- I make that point to dispel the idea that we can’t draw people in, personally or corporately, without some sort of sideshow.
 - We **don’t** need banners or lighted signs or bouncy houses or a great band or a beautiful building, and on and on
 - Don’t think I’m being critical. Those things are **great**.
 - But at the end of the day, what we need, **what those around us need**, is **the word of God, made attractive by our lives**
 - We need that in every aspect of everything we do.
 - Your life should preach the word of God.
 - Your car should preach the word of God.
 - Your book collection should preach the word of God.
 - Your reputation should preach the word of God.
 - What you do when people see you should preach the word of God.
 - What you do when people **don’t** see you should preach the word of God.
 - And, of course, your mouth should preach the word of God.

- What's the old saying? "You may be the only Bible some people ever read."
 - Think about how many times Jesus was welcomed, loved, and was able to minister to – to **love** – others when there were no miracles involved.
 - Think about the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears.
 - There were no miracles there. It was a dinner party.
 - But Jesus' **authenticity** engendered that sort of response.
 - Think about Zaccheus.
 - Jesus didn't work any miracles there.
 - He just went to Zaccheus' house.
 - We can assume there was discussion of some sort.
 - But Jesus' **reputation** made Zaccheus want to spend time with Him, and His **genuine-ness** gave Him the platform to speak the truth to Zaccheus in love.
 - The folks who were more interested in fake appearances than the reality of love said, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."
 - But whatever was said, it provoked change in Zaccheus.
 - Zaccheus was changed by Jesus' attractive – even irresistible – faith.
 - You get the point.
 - Success involves an attractive faith.
 - And I want you to notice throughout this sermon, I'm going to try **not to qualify** success.
 - This is not "Godly success" versus some other success
 - Because **everything** we do should be Godly.
 - This is just **success**.
 - So we find success through practicing an **attractive faith**.

• Next we find success through practicing **deep obedience**.

- Verse 4 says, *'When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."'*
- Why do I say "**deep obedience?**"
- I'd like to think that just "obedience" is enough, but we have a tendency to not work that way.
- I want you to think of the idea of obedience in two separate contexts.
- The first is the **level of obedience.**
- I used to have two dogs: Buster and Megan.
 - Buster was a rat terrier, and every ounce a rat terrier.
 - If you've ever owned a terrier of any sort you know why they're so often called "terrors" instead of "terriers."
 - Megan was a Shetland Sheep Dog, or what some think of as a "Miniature Collie."
 - Both dogs were very bright, but they were also very different.
 - I would walk them together, and when I came to a street crossing I would look at them and say, "sit!"
 - Megan would obediently sit and stay perfectly still until I said, "let's go."
 - Buster, on the other hand, would literally **vibrate** until I said, "let's go" or **even so much as made eye contact**, at which point he would **rocket** out into the intersection.
 - So, both of the dogs were **obedient**, so to speak. But they were two entirely different levels of obedience.
- Second, I want you to think about the **polarity of obedience.**
 - That sounds odd, but think about **polarity** in terms of a battery.
 - It has two **poles**: negative and positive.
 - We sometimes have a tendency to think of only the **negative** polarity of obedience.
 - Obedience becomes **not** doing the things we're **not** supposed to do.
 - Now that is a real part of obedience, but it's not the only part.
 - There's also the **positive** polarity of obedience
 - In other words, **doing** the things we're supposed to **do**.
 - Simon's reward in this passage doesn't come from **not** doing something.

- It came from **doing**.
- It came from going out where it is deeper and letting down the nets, even though Simon thought this was ridiculous.
- And what an incredible lesson this is.
 - Simon says, “we fished all night and didn’t catch at thing.”
 - He had every reason to believe this fishing hole was spent.
 - He was a fisherman by trade. Jesus wasn’t.
 - Instead, what does he do?
 - **“But if you say so, I’ll let the nets down again.”**
 - How much better would our lives be if that was our standard? **“If you say so, God...”** I will **obey**.
- And did Simon find success in obedience?
 - *“And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.”*
- When was the last time we had torn nets?
- When was the last time this place was **crowded**?
- When was the last time we had so much blessing, so much **success**, we **had to** share it because we couldn’t hold it all?
- Success comes through **practicing an attractive faith**.
- Success comes through **practicing deep obedience**.

- **Next, we find success comes through practicing acute self-awareness.**

- This is one of my things. You know it is.
- But if it weren’t so important, I wouldn’t keep preaching about it.
- Verse 8 says, *‘When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, “Oh, Lord, please leave me—I’m such a sinful man.” ‘*
- Well, what *just happened*?
 - It says “when Peter realized what had happened...”
 - So what just happened?

- Well, Peter, the professional fisherman, had just spent an entire evening trying to catch fish, with no success. *“We didn’t catch a thing”* he said.
- And Jesus, a carpenter and itinerant preacher, said, “try over there.”
- And Peter and his friends caught more fish than they ever thought possible.
- Luke says, *“they were awestruck by the number of fish they had caught.”*
- Peter had an encounter with **acute self-awareness**.
 - “This man, Jesus, is something above what I am.”
 - **It is, or should be, the natural reaction to the presence of God.**
 - Joel’s sermon last week, from Isaiah 6, showed us the same reaction from Isaiah.
 - “Woe to me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”
- You know me, and you know I’m not a fan of people.
 - I believe, left to our own devices, we will inevitably choose **wrong**.
 - But rather than rattle on about my opinion on self-awareness, let me give you some verses to consider:

Romans 12:3 *“Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: **Don’t think you are better than you really are.** Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.”*

2 Corinthians 13:5 *“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.”*

Galatians 6:3 *“If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.”*

Proverbs 21:2 *“People may be right in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their heart.”*

- See? I’m not just making this stuff up.
- I love you, family.
 - You are some of my favorite people in the world.

- It is an utter and complete **privilege** to stand here and bring you teaching.
 - But the **second** we forget that we are all just ugly, lumpy clay in the hands of the Master, things will go horribly **wrong**.
 - Success comes through **practicing an attractive faith**.
 - Success comes through **practicing deep obedience**.
 - Success comes through **practicing acute self-awareness**
- And, finally, success comes through **practicing extravagant self-denial**.
- At the end of the passage Jesus says, *“Don’t be afraid! From now on you’ll be fishing for people!”*
 - Notice that this commission comes directly from Peter’s acute self-denial.
 - “Lord, I am unworthy!”
 - And Jesus says, **“Yep, you are, or you were. But guess what, Simon? I use broken things.”**
 - Karl Marx said, “religion is the opiate for the masses.”
 - More recently that thought is expressed like this: “God is just a crutch.”
 - And I say, **“bring on the crutch! For I am broken.”**
 - So Jesus commissions them, and Luke writes, *“As soon as they landed, they left **everything** and followed Jesus.”*
 - They left... **most** everything.
 - **NO.**
 - They left... **everything**.
 - So often we think of this in terms of **things**.
 - It’s not that much of a stretch, since that’s exactly what Simon did.
 - But I will tell you this: I’ve been following Jesus for 46 years.
 - At times I’ve followed **very** closely.
 - At times I’ve followed from a distance.
 - But He’s never asked me to sell my house.
 - He’s never asked me to sell my car or my motorcycle or, honestly, anything else I’ve ever owned.
 - Make no mistake. If He did... I **would**.
 - But He hasn’t.

- But that doesn't mean I haven't left a lot of things behind to follow Him.
 - I've left relationships.
 - I've left opportunities.
 - I've left jobs.
 - I've left homes.
- And **please** don't think I'm looking for a pat on the back. I'm not.
- I'm looking for you to see the point.
- No matter what God **does** or **doesn't** ask you to leave, He wants to be **first**.
 - He wants to be **paramount**.
 - He wants to be **unchallenged**.
 - Here's a Sunday School word: He wants to be **sovereign**. Above **all**.
 - And He wants **you** to live out Romans 12:1-2

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

- He wants **you** to look in the mirror and **honestly** say, "I'd rather have Jesus than **anything** this world affords today."

- So, what does success come through? How do we achieve it?
 - Through **practicing an attractive faith**
 - Through **practicing radical, deep, unwavering obedience**
 - Through **practicing acute self-awareness**
 - Through **practicing extravagant self-denial**
- I don't know if you realize, in the gospel context, what the event in this passage we read today was.
- It was Jesus calling His first disciples
- These men that followed Jesus lived in fear and persecution.
- Most of them died badly.
- But ask yourself, were they successful?

- **They changed the world**
- **And then ask yourself, “am I successful?”**
- That’s a question that needs answering, and maybe today you want to talk about it more.
 - If so, there will be folks at the front here. Just come up and stand at the front row while we’re singing, or find one of us after the service.
 - We’d love to help you start down the road to success.