

Luke 5:1-26 – Ready and Willing to Serve

- Read Luke 5:1-26
- Pray
- Mission trip
 - God presented the opportunity through Dr. Anderson.
 - Four men were ready to respond
 - With fortitude (taking the time off and paying their own way)
 - With flexibility (prepared to do whatever was needed)

I begin with this report about this mission trip because it highlights something we are blessed to notice in our Scripture passage this morning. In fact, this point is really one that is prevalent throughout the entirety of the Gospels. As I studied this passage I was struck by the fact that our Lord was constantly ready to do good to others at every opportunity. He truly modeled the very spiritual readiness that Paul commands us in Colossians 4:5, when he says, “*Make the most of every opportunity.*” Spiritual readiness is, I believe, an under-discussed and undervalued aspect of Christian life and service, and so, today, I come to you with this message from our text:

- Be ready and willing to serve.

There are, of course, many important biblical points that could be made from Scripture about spiritual readiness. However, for our purposes this morning, I want to confine our discussion of this topic to two essential aspects of spiritual readiness that we see at work in our passage. And the first of these two observations is this:

1.) Spiritual readiness requires spiritual fortitude.

As we have discussed, Jesus’ public ministry was officially inaugurated by His baptism at the hands of John the Baptist in Luke chapter 3. From that point on, we have seen His days becoming extremely demanding. First, in Luke chapter four, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert where He fasted for forty grueling days in the desert, during which time He was ruthlessly bombarded by the most sinister temptations that Satan could muster. After that, Luke tells us of the rise of Jesus’ fame as He traveled, preached, and healed people throughout Judea as He headed His hometown of Nazareth, where He would stand in the synagogue and boldly announce Himself to be the long-awaited Messiah of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 61. However, His favor among His hometown folk was short-lived. As soon as Jesus made clear to them that His life and ministry was not about

entertaining them and their preferences, they attempted to murder Him by throwing Him off of a cliff!

Talk about the potential for discouragement! Let me ask you, how many of us would have the spiritual fortitude to press on in obedience to God's will if doing so nearly got us tossed off of a cliff? Yet, Jesus does exactly that—He presses on with fortitude, forfeiting the comfort He experienced in His next stop, Capernaum, in order to pursue His purpose. In Luke 4:43, He declares: *“I must preach the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other towns also because that is why I was sent.”*

That is the point at which we pick up Christ's ministry today. And once again, in chapter five we see our Lord's unwearied readiness to do good to others at every opportunity. We find Him, once again, preaching to a large group of people who were, as verse one indicates, *“crowding around him and listening to the word of God.”* We see Him once more among the swarms of people who were constantly surrounding Him...constantly asking Him for favors...constantly begging Him to teach them, to bless them, to heal them, and to drive out their demons. In fact, in verses 1-3, we see that the crowd had encroached around Him so tightly that He needed to get in a boat and put out from shore in order to preach to them.

However—and here is the main point of this discussion—Jesus still seized the opportunity. He preached to them nonetheless. Though He certainly could have said, “I am tired,” or “Maybe later,” or even “Leave me alone you leeches!”...He did not. Rather, He pressed on with a persevering passion for His mission to preach to them the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He modeled for them the same perseverance that Peter would emulate just a little while later when He obediently lowers the fishing nets again in spite of himself. Jesus chose to do the good deed that needed to be done because the opportunity presented itself. He pressed on in sacrificial service because that is what He had been sent to do.

You know, the same attitude should be true for you and for me, because we are sent forth to bring praise to God by doing the good deeds for which He has created us. Ephesians 2:10 tells that *“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* You see, you and I have been formed by God to emulate the same spiritual readiness that we see in Christ, and to do so, we must serve Him with spiritual fortitude. That is, we must continually strive to do what is best for other people whenever the opportunity presents itself. In Galatians 6:9, the Apostle Paul writes, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give*

up.” Let me ask you, what opportunities to serve Christ lie before you right now? Are you ready to walk in them? Do you have the spiritual fortitude to deny yourself and seize the opportunity to serve others for God’s glory? When the going gets tough, are you prepared to press on, or are you inclined to resign? Spiritual readiness begins with steadfast spiritual determination to serve God...wherever we might be...whenever He might call...regardless of how we might feel.

The second observation about spiritual readiness that we see in our text today is that...

2.) Spiritual readiness requires spiritual flexibility.

-- Bruce and Koy – Take all the tools!

-- Men’s mission trips going for one purpose, yet fulfilling another

-- They could have said, “Well, this is what we came to do, and we intend to do it, or we will do nothing!”

Likewise, in our verses this morning we learn from our Lord that a flexible spirit is a vitally important aspect of spiritual readiness. In other words, we see Jesus modeling the type of spiritual flexibility that we are called to copy. With that in mind, please look with me at verse three, and as we read it, take note of the flexibility with which Jesus preached. It says, “*He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.*” Notice that, on this day, Jesus did not preach from some hallowed building or a location consecrated for public worship. Neither does He teach from some pulpit specifically constructed for a preacher’s use. In fact, He doesn’t even preach from dry ground. Rather, He preaches in the open air from a fisherman’s boat. The crowd seems to have squeezed around Him so tightly that it was difficult for Him to remain on the shore and preach. In that environment, most of us would most likely be very tempted to throw up our hands in disgust and say, “Aw, forget it!” I know that I would be. Jesus, however, with a spirit of flexibility, creatively came up with a rather unusual solution to the problem—He preached to the crowd from fisherman’s boat.

Similarly, in verse 12, when the socially condemned leper comes to Him and asks to be healed, Jesus again models the keen spiritual readiness that results from a truly flexible spirit. This leper hadn’t made an appointment on Jesus’ daily schedule. Worse yet, he was violating proper first century procedures for lepers. Lepers were definitely not supposed to jump in front of people walking along the road, as we see here. On the contrary, the laws of the day required him to shout “Unclean! Unclean!” as others were approaching in order to warn them not to

come too close. Regardless, Jesus doesn't shun Him like His society said He was supposed to. Neither does He walk by unaffected or ignore the leper because of his improperly-made request. Rather, Jesus stops and takes time to listen to this leper and have compassion on Him. He seized the opportunity to meet his need.

In both cases, whether preaching to the crowd from the boat or attending to the request of an audacious social outcast, souls were waiting to be fed, and personal inconvenience played no part in Jesus' thoughts. God's work could not stand still simply because not every duck was in a row. Jesus was ready to be flexible, and because of that, He made a way to get the good deed done.

With that said, let me pause to impress upon you what spiritual flexibility does *not* mean and must *never* even begin to imply. Listen carefully: It has nothing to do with doctrine. In far too many places, being spiritually "flexible" is wrongly taken to mean engaging in the portions of Scripture that we like but ignoring, even denying, the portions that do not suit individual sensibilities. Such an attitude does not reflect flexibility; it is the perspective of a heart filled with pride. Let it never be so with us! Let us always affirm the complete inerrancy and infallibility of God's Word. Let us at all times acknowledge that submitting to its truth can never be a matter of personal preference.

Having made that crucial distinction, however, we encounter an equally unbiblical problem whenever we confuse our personal preferences, policies, and procedures with biblical truth. You know, of all the things Jesus was *not*, He was most certainly *not* a bureaucrat. In fact, Jesus' harshest words were aimed at the Pharisees, and at the root of His condemnation of them is the fact that they were more concerned about man-made policies and procedures than they were about passion for God and personal piety. Listen to Christ's words regarding this kind of spiritual bureaucracy in Mark 7:6-9, where He replies to the Pharisees by saying: *"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."* And he said to them: *"You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"*

You see, what Jesus is communicating here is that demanding our own man-made traditions is useless, selfish, and unholy if doing so prevents us from doing what pleases God. He is the potter; we are the clay. We live for Him, not Him for us! If we stand unwilling to modify our man-made preferences, procedures, and

presuppositions in favor of God's plans and purposes, then, like the Pharisees, we will miserably miss our God-appointed purpose. For example, as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, we ought not wait until every little difficulty is removed before we head out to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Jesus didn't! As Proverbs 22:13 says, "*The lazy person is full of excuses, saying, 'If I go outside, I might meet a lion in the street and be killed!'*" Let us therefore stop making excuses and start making disciples!

Listen to this admonition from theologian J.C. Ryle, who wrote, "Where we are and as we are, in season and out of season, by one means or by another, by tongue or by pen, let us strive to be always working for God." Spiritual readiness, then, happens when we are ready to serve the Lord in whichever way He desires, however the situation demands, regardless of what we might personally prefer. Spiritual readiness requires a flexible spirit.

Having made these two points about spiritual readiness, I want to close with a brief discussion about why it is so important to Christian living that brings honor to God. It is vital to our walk and witness because God, in His grace, is constantly sending us waves and tides of opportunities to be used by Him in remarkable ways. He has surely sent them in the past, He will surely send them again in the future, and I am certain that He is sending them to us in the here and now. The question is, are we ready to seize them for His glory? Are you and I ready to tackle every spiritual opportunity for all it is worth and for the glory of God? Are we ready to meet them with the spiritual fortitude to do good for others at a moment's notice? Are we constantly ready to serve God whenever and wherever that opportunity surfaces?

Spiritual readiness also means meeting the tides of spiritual opportunity with a flexible spirit. Remember, Christian service is not about doing it our way; it is about going God's way for His great glory. It means having a Titus 3:1 attitude which is always "*ready to do whatever is good.*" In short, God is certainly sending tides of opportunity our way. Are we ready to forget our personal preferences so that we can fulfill God's perfect purposes? Are we ready to serve God humbly, in whichever way is best for others? Or, on the other hand, are we only willing to serve Him in ways that we find personally comfortable?

Moreover, do we realize that as quickly as the blessed tides of spiritual opportunity comes, so they as quickly pass? As Galatians 6:10 says, "*So then,*

while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

I want to close today by quoting to you from Shakespeare, because it is this very idea which Shakespeare emphasizes in the fourth act of Julius Caesar. In a dialogue between Brutus and Cassius, in which Brutus attempts to enlist the aid of Cassius, Shakespeare speaks compellingly of the both the power and the brevity of the tides. He writes:

There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyages of their life are bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat and we must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures.

What Shakespeare is saying here is not only that the tides have great power, but that they also are irretrievable, unstoppable, un-recallable. Their uplifting strength comes for but a few hours and then it disappears. This principle unquestionably applies to us as servants of Christ, because just as God orchestrates the ocean waves, and just as surely as the tides ebb and flow, so, too, God sends us waves and tides of opportunities for Christian service and spiritual growth. If we are not ready to meet this flood of spiritual opportunity, we will surely find ourselves left in shallows, wallowing in spiritual malpractice, having lost the blessed ventures God sent our way.

In closing, my prayer for each of you today is that you are sensing what I sense. My prayer is that you will see a bit of the vision that I believe God has for our congregation, because I am convinced that He is up to something amazing in our midst. I am convinced that He is raising up an army of passionate ambassadors of the Gospel through whom He intends to transform this community for Christ right here at First Baptist Church of Carmi. But, if we are going to fulfill this vision, then we must make ourselves ready. Neither spiritual spinelessness nor selfishness will get the job done. If we would seize these moments for God’s eternal glory, then we must walk with the spiritual fortitude and flexibility to do what God commands.

- Spiritual readiness requires a selfless focus upon others.
- Spiritual readiness requires faithfulness in private worship.

- Preaching from the boat to the crowd that formed at the Sea of Galilee
- Taking time to minister to and heal the leper
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- What does spiritual readiness look like?
 - Selflessness
 - Service
 - Testimony
- How does one grow in spiritual readiness?
 - Prayer – v. 16
 - Colossians 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
 - Ephesians 6:18 pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.
- Be ready!
 - Titus 3:1-2 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

Willing and Able to Save

Leprosy = sin and its effects

Physical ailments = The reality of spiritual maladies