

Overcoming Obstacles That Stand in the Way of Trusting Christ

Luke 5:17-26

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The world blesses those who must see before they will believe. However, the Lord Jesus Christ blesses those who believe Him even when they do not yet see the full realization of that promise (Joshua 3). Dear ones, biblical faith is a gift of God freely given by God's grace to those whom God effectually calls unto Himself. This faith is not based upon what we see. Faith essentially lays hold of the promise of God and upon the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God who cannot lie. Does the sincere Christian yet struggle in not trusting the Lord in various areas of his life? Yes, he/she does. But the sincere Christian also desires and endeavors by God's grace to grow in trusting the Lord more and more throughout life and in the many trials and heartaches that stand like huge walls at times in front of him/her. The Lord Jesus even pointed out the immaturity and smallness of faith in the lives of His own Apostles (**Matthew 8:26; John 20:29**). In fact, all that the Lord brings into our lives is intended to build our faith and trust in Him—to direct our trust away from the things of this life and unto the Lord Jesus Christ in every circumstance—to grow us in our knowledge of and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. Your heartaches, failures, afflictions, and hardships are not for your destruction, but for your increase in faith. There is nothing like a severe trial to take our eyes off of ourselves, to show us our inadequacy, and to turn the eye of faith upon Christ. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

This Lord's Day let us consider together the contrast between faith and unbelief as found in Luke 5:17-26. The main points of the sermon are the following: (1) The Obstacle to Faith (Luke 5:17-18); (2) The Evidence of

Faith (Luke 5:19-20); (3) The Evidence of Unbelief (Luke 5:21-24); (4) The Reward of Faith (Luke 5:25-26).

I. The Obstacle to Faith (Luke 5:17-18).

A. When the Lord Jesus completed His mission in taking the gospel to the cities of Galilee, Christ returns to Capernaum (Mark 2:1). Soon word of Christ's return was spread throughout the city, and immediately the house in which He was staying was filled to capacity to such an extent that there was no more room in the house for anyone to hear Him.

1. Now with so many desiring to hear the words of Christ, one may wonder why He didn't simply move Himself outside, so that sufficient room would not be an issue. The reason? God had planned to use that full house to portray before the eyes of all who were there and before our own mind's eye, the contrast between faith and unbelief. See how the Lord takes even what appears to be such an uncomfortable and seemingly overwhelming circumstance (a packed and crowded house), and ordains that it will be used as an opportunity to grow our faith and to manifest our faith in Christ to those around us.

2. Likewise, dear ones, the uncomfortable events of your life are the very circumstances in which the Lord tests the quality of your faith: whether it be the slow traffic on the road, the tools of your trade that malfunction, the illness that afflicts you, the boss that lays you off, the problems that arise in your marriage, or the financial burdens that may seem to overwhelm you. God tests your faith by placing various uncomfortable circumstances before you which hinder or seem to delay your goals (even righteous goals) and plans. These are the crowded rooms that you face that would seem like huge obstacles in trusting in the Lord to supply the needs that you have. How do you react to uncomfortable such hindrances or delays? Do you trust the Lord that He

has ordained this uncomfortable event to grow and manifest your faith in Christ, or do you rather become angry and frustrated when things don't work out as you planned? Understand that God could have removed that trial, if He chose to do so. It is there by His appointment for the increase of your faith in Him.

B. Here in the biblical account before us, a couple potential hindrances to faith are presented.

1. First, there was the potential hindrance of palsy or paralysis. We are not told how this man came to be paralyzed. We may at least conclude from the fact that he had to be carried that he was paralyzed from the waist down (palsy was/is also often accompanied with involuntary shaking and uncontrollable tremors as well). It was as if there was no life in his legs. They were wasting away. His case appeared hopeless from the world's perspective (for "seeing is believing" and "not seeing is not believing"). Thus, in this condition the paralyzed man could not walk or carry himself to Jesus. This was the first test of faith. How would he get to Christ? If he could not go under his own strength, he would have faithful friends take him (O the blessedness of faithful friends who will bear us up in the time of our greatest needs—to have such we must become such). Whether he asked them to take him or whether they first suggested to him that they wanted to take him we are not told. But this disability was not going to hinder this man's faith. He was determined to see the Lord, for his faith was firmly anchored in the Lord that Christ was able to heal him of his infirmity, Christ was able to save him; and his friends as well were determined that he would see the Lord.

a. Dear ones, we at times allow our limitations (which limitations may seem impossible to overcome, whether physical, financial, spiritual) to hinder us from coming to the Lord in faith and doing whatever we can within those limitations to serve Him. God has not placed those obstacles in your path so as to discourage you from

coming to Him in faith, but rather to test the quality of your faith and to increase your faith (**2 Corinthians 12:7-10**).

b. God gives us such limitations so that He alone will receive the glory through that which we do. Will you come to Him with all your human limitations, with all your sins, with all your failures? You will find forgiveness, comfort, and hope in Christ.

2. Second, there was the hindrance of the full house. Once the four friends and the paralytic arrived at the place where Christ was preaching, they were faced with another significant obstacle to their faith: they could not get through the crowd to speak to Jesus. What would they do? The way to Christ seemed blocked by a house filled with people, no doubt many other needy people. It may be that the Lord will be too busy, too preoccupied, or too inaccessible to hear, to help, to provide for me. Dear ones, that is not the object of faith, but rather the object of our faith is in Christ who is ever faithful and in mercy invites even the chief of sinners to come in faith to Him.

II. The Evidence of Faith (Luke 5:19-20).

A. When confronted with the obstacle of a full house, the paralytic and his friends were all the more determined that they would see Jesus. The obstacle was not a deterrent to their faith. Again, we are not told from the text whose idea it was to lower the paralytic through the roof, but we can assume it was agreeable both to the paralytic and to his four friends. Their faith was not easily discouraged, for when one obstacle would deter them from seeing Christ, faith found another way to see Christ. Dear ones, faith in Christ can overcome all obstacles that the enemy would use to defeat us (**1 John 5:4-5**). Our text says in verse 20, "And when he saw their faith." Christ saw the faith of the paralytic and of the four friends. How was it seen? It was by their works. Faith without works is dead (James 1:26). Jesus saw not only the condition of their

souls, but He also saw that faith was evidenced by their refusal to turn back, to cast aside their faith simply because they were confronted with obstacles.

1. Dear ones, faith in Christ is that means by which we are united to Christ (or joined to Christ who is the power of God). We may have a powerful battery that is more than capable of running our car, but unless the battery cables are connected to the battery, all of the power of that battery will be fruitless. Dear ones, do you realize the power of God, the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the love of God, and the righteousness of God that is available to you who trust alone in Christ alone? It is the power that spoke this world into existence, that upholds all things by the word of His power, and that raised Jesus from the dead.

2. The Apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesian Christians would understand, grasp, and apply this one truth in their lives (**Ephesians 1:17-20**). We have noted **The Evidence of Faith** in the lives of these needy men; let us now consider **The Evidence of Unbelief** in the lives of the scribes and the Pharisees.

III. **The Evidence of Unbelief (Luke 5:21-24).**

A. Apparently these Pharisees had been appointed to investigate the teaching and miracles of the Lord (Luke 5:17). There they were within the house when the Lord saw the faith of these men and declared to the paralyzed man, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee” (Luke 5:20). Now the Pharisees upon hearing these words showed that they were orthodox in their theology (in one respect), but were unorthodox in their application of their theology.

1. They were orthodox in their theology in reasoning thus in their hearts, “Who can forgive sins, but God alone” (Luke 5:21)? That is absolutely true. Only God can forgive sins. Apostles and ministers of Jesus Christ may declare the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ;

they may declare to all who put their trust in Christ alone for eternal salvation that they are forgiven, but they cannot forgive sin. That is a prerogative of God alone (**Isaiah 43:25**). The Roman Catholic Church abominably errs when it usurps the authority of Christ and grants it to her priests in pardoning sin. Listen to the heresy of Rome as taken from a one of their approved catechisms, entitled *A New Catechism Of The Catholic Faith* (pp.61,62):

1. **Why did Christ die on the cross?**
Christ died on the cross to forgive your sin.
2. **Did Jesus Christ forgive sins?**
Jesus Christ did forgive sins.
3. **How could Christ forgive sins?**
Christ could forgive sins because he is God.
4. **Could Christ give the power to forgive sins to men?**
Because Christ is God he could give the power to forgive sins to men.
5. **Did Christ give the power to forgive sins to men?**
Christ did give the power to forgive sins to men.
6. **To what men in the Church did Christ give the power to forgive sins?**
Christ gave the power to forgive sins to the twelve apostles, the first priests.
10. **Who today have this power?**
All Catholic bishops and priests.
12. **Does the priest really forgive your sins?**
With the power of Christ given to him in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest really forgives your sins.

2. Although orthodox in this aspect of their theology, they were dreadfully unorthodox in their application of theology when they likewise reasoned in their hearts: “Who is this which speaketh blasphemies” (Luke 5:21)? They did not understand that Christ was God in the flesh and therefore had the divine right and authority to forgive sin. Dear ones, we must not only have an orthodoxy that is sound in doctrine, but we must also have an orthopraxy and application of doctrine in love and holiness that is sound in practice within the Church, within the family, and within our own personal lives (even when no one else is watching—for God is watching). Misapplication of principles is not inconsequential, but is highly significant.

B. The unbelief of these Pharisees is manifested in denying the deity of Christ. They did not believe He had the power to forgive sin.

1. Now we may not consciously profess with our mouths this atheistic philosophy, but the practical outworking of this godless philosophy manifests itself in our thoughts and actions in various ways.

2. We as professing Christians may manifest **unbelief** (when we will not accept or trust God's revealed will in His Word), **worry** (when we will not cast all our worries upon Christ), **fear** (when we fear man or circumstances in life more than we trust God), **unthankfulness** (when we act as though God does not exist by not expressing our gratitude to Him for all daily benefits), **discontentment** (when we are more concerned with what we want than with what we have been given by Christ), **misplaced faith** in oneself, one's abilities, or any other mere creature (when we look more to ourselves or others to meet our physical or spiritual needs than to God), **forgetting God** and His Word throughout the day (when we live our day without little or no thought of the Lord as if He did not exist), or **neglecting to spend time with the Lord** in prayer in secret worship, family worship, or corporate worship (when we ignore and put off times of necessary worship with the Lord or become indifferent and apathetic to times of holy worship). Yes, we as professing Christians must earnestly pray to be forgiven and delivered from practical atheism in its many unbelieving expressions in our lives.

C. Furthermore, the Pharisees evidenced their unbelief when they would not look upon Christ as God when He demonstrated His divine power to forgive sin by reading their very thoughts (Luke 5:22-23) and by raising the paralytic from his bed (Luke 5:24-25). For you see, unbelief is not so much a question of not seeing the truth, as much as it is a question of refusing to believe and embrace the truth (when the Lord reveals it to us). How we should constantly pray that the Lord would keep us from all spiritual and intellectual pride and from all self-deception in

matters related to doctrine, worship and church government.

D. The Lord Jesus frames an argument for the Pharisees to consider by asking them, “Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk” (Luke 5:23)? This question was no doubt directed toward thoughts that were going through the minds of the unbelieving Pharisees like, “It’s easy for you to merely say that you can forgive sins— anyone could make that claim. How could anyone disprove such a statement since no one can directly and immediately look into the courts of heaven to verify whether the man’s sins have in fact been forgiven?” But the Lord assumes for the sake of argument that it is easy simply to make such a claim as “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” But Jesus says in effect, “If that is easy, is it also easy to say to this paralytic man, ‘Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?’ Is that also easy? Well then, in order that you may know that I am the Son of Man, the Messiah who is God in flesh, I will also do that which you believe is harder and will heal the paralytic, thus demonstrating my divine prerogative to also forgive sin” (Luke 5:24).

E. And yet the Pharisees still would not trust alone in Jesus alone for their eternal salvation (not even after the most undeniable and powerful miracle occurred—one upon which Jesus based all His claims to deity and truth: **Matthew 28:11-15**). That is the nature of unbelief. It is not that enough information or enough truth has not been revealed, it is that unbelief will simply not embrace and appropriate the truth that has been revealed.

IV. The Reward of Faith (Luke 5:25-26).

A. The Reward of Faith was twofold: Forgiveness and Healing.

1. The Lord bestowed forgiveness of sin in response to the

faith of the paralytic. People may have looked upon this man, and thought that his greatest need was being delivered from his paralysis, but in reality, his greatest need was the forgiveness of his sin. There is in fact not a greater need that man has than this. For sin will lead a man to eternal torment in hell, forever separated from all hope of God's grace and mercy. For this reason, the greatest blessing this paralytic received that day was the forgiveness of his sin. Dear ones, if the Lord would have stopped there and only forgiven the man of his sin, he would have received riches of eternal life which could never be taken from him. He embraced Christ as his only hope of eternal salvation, and he was forgiven all his sins. He did not come to Christ proclaiming his worthiness to be forgiven; he did not appeal to his own law-keeping—he came with simply this qualification: he was a sinner in need of a Savior and He threw himself upon the mercy and faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Christ will forgive you, dear ones, regardless of your past, regardless of how you have turned from Him, and even treated him with contempt. He will cast none out who come to him in faith.

2. The Lord demonstrated that that the sins of this paralytic were indeed forgiven by healing him. In this case, healing was an evidence of the forgiveness of sin. Now the Lord may not deliver us from every physical affliction in this life, but deliver us He will (by granting grace to endure the afflictions and trials of this life until we leave the poverty and misery of this life and pass into the riches and glory of heaven).

B. In closing, I would like to share with you the life of one who did not walk by sight, but by faith in the promises of God. His name was George Müller, and he was the founder and director of the Ashley Down orphanage in Bristol, England, and cared for over 10,000 orphans during his life. Those poor orphans who lined the streets of London were not only provided food and lodging, but were also given a Christian

education, and such a good education that he was accused of raising the poor above their natural station in life.

Müller's work (along with his wife) in caring for and educating orphans began in 1836 in their own rented home with thirty girls. In 1845, Müller's orphanage had grown to such an extent that neighbors were complaining about the noise and disruption to the public utilities, so Müller decided that a separate building was needed to house 300 children, and in 1849, at Ashley Down, Bristol, that home was opened. By May 26, 1870, 1,722 children were daily being fed, clothed, lodged and educated in five homes.

Now this is the amazing and challenging truth about Müller's work. He refused a salary, and never asked for a single penny from anyone in providing for his own family or for any need within the orphanage. He believed the Lord had led him to show forth not his own faith in the promises of God, but rather to show forth as a testimony for all to see the amazing faithfulness of God in supplying all the needs of His people. Without making any requests for financial support or borrowing a cent (but simply taking every need to the Lord in prayer), five homes for orphans were built at a cost of over 100,000 British pounds (5,000,000 current amount or over 7,700,000 U.S. dollars).

Many times, he received unsolicited food donations only hours before they were needed to feed the children, further strengthening his faith in God. On one occasion, the children had nothing to eat for breakfast. They gave thanks for breakfast while all the children were seated at the table. As they finished praying, the baker knocked on the door with sufficient fresh bread to feed everyone, and the milkman gave them plenty of fresh milk because his cart broke down in front of the orphanage. Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, dear children of the living God as we close

(Matthew 6:25-33).

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