

# *The Effect of Submission*

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1<sup>st</sup> in a four-part series

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*Luke 5:1–11 (CEB)*

One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God's word. <sup>2</sup>Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup>**When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, "Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch."**

<sup>5</sup>**Simon replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I'll drop the nets."**

<sup>6</sup>**So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting.** <sup>7</sup>They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. <sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Leave me, Lord, for I'm a sinner!" <sup>9</sup>Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. <sup>10</sup>James and John, Zebedee's sons, were Simon's partners and they were amazed too.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people."

<sup>11</sup>As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

*Matthew 7:13–14, 24–27 (CEB)*

<sup>13</sup>"Go in through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction is broad and the road wide, so many people enter through it. <sup>14</sup>But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.

<sup>24</sup>"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. <sup>25</sup>The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. <sup>26</sup>But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. <sup>27</sup>The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed."

*Will we submit to our Lord  
and embrace the path of obedience that leads to abundance?*

It was the 12<sup>th</sup> year in the reign of Tiberius<sup>1</sup>, the successor to Caesar Augustus. Pontius Pilate was arriving to take control of his new post, the Roman province of Judea in the far eastern reaches of the Empire. Pilate expected trouble, for the Jewish population was troublesome to all the procurators before him. And he believed that such trouble was best met by strength, a show of force to demonstrate who was boss. Further, he wanted to do away with much of the Jewish law that set them apart from other populations in the empire.

So Pilate decided to enter Jerusalem carrying the ensign of Caesar, even though the Jewish leadership and the Romans had an understanding that such graven images would never be brought inside the ancient city. The Jewish historian, Josephus<sup>2</sup>, tells us that Pilate sneaked the images into the city at night. When it was discovered, multitudes came from all over to confront Pilate and demand removal of the ensigns. After about a week, Pilate decided enough was enough and ordered his soldiers to arm themselves and surround the crowd. Pilate threatened the throng of Jews with death if they did not disperse and end the demonstrations.

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<sup>1</sup> AD 26

<sup>2</sup> Titus Lavius Josephus was a Jewish historian of the late first century. He wrote a history of the Jews, a biography of Herod the Great, a history of the Jewish Wars, and more. Though originally fighting against the Romans in the great rebellion of the 60's AD, he later became a Roman citizen and took up his writing.

The response of the gathered Jews was swift and chilling – they bent down, bowed their heads, and bared their necks to the Roman swords. They said they would rather be killed than willingly abandon their law. Pilate relented and ordered the images be taken back to Caesarea on the coast.<sup>3</sup>

What did Pilate want? He wanted it to be 100% clear that the Jews *submitted* to Roman rule regardless of their local religious customs and practices. But the Jews would never really submit and 40 years after hundreds of Jewish men bared their necks to Pilate, open rebellion broke out across Judea and Galilee, ending at Masada.

The Jews understood that they had been called by God to be his people and submit only to him and his teachings. They were to worship only God, devote themselves only to God, obey only God – not Babylonians, nor Persians, nor Greeks, nor Romans. Though the Jews often fell far short of the mark, they understood that they were to submit to their maker before any others.

#### Faith and Trust

Sometimes the simplest words, like “faith,” can be turned into church words that we recite all the time, but never really think about. Ask yourself – what do we mean when we say we have faith in God or faith in Jesus? If you have trouble coming up with a simple answer, try using the word “trust.” When we have faith in Jesus, it means that we trust him – completely. Even when we say we believe in Jesus, it is a statement about our faith, our trust. In the New Testament, the word we translate “believe” is simply the verb form of the noun “faith”!

There are many questions about God and life that I cannot answer. But I trust God. I trust that he will always be good and just and wise. I trust that he will always love me. I trust that I can tell him anything – that, in truth, he knows me better than I know myself.

Do we? If you are like me, you choke a bit at the mere mention of “submission.” I’m an American, after all. Aren’t I the “master of my fate”? Am I not “the captain of my soul”?<sup>4</sup> Our cultural inheritance pulls us mightily toward our independence. Yet, much of disciple-making is learning to be dependent upon God, who is our master and captain. To speak of submitting to God is to say that we yield to God’s authority, that we will obey our Maker before anyone else. It is like the old hymn, “There is no other way to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.”

#### *Clearing the deck*

But submitting to our Lord, learning his ways, and embracing obedience is awfully hard for most of us. To start with, Jesus’ teachings about obedience of God’s law, God’s instruction, are easily misunderstood by Christians.

Gallup and other groups often poll Americans about their religious beliefs. One consistent finding is that well over half of all Americans, a lot of whom have to be Christian<sup>5</sup>, believe that if we do enough good things in our lifetime we can earn our way into heaven. But this is not the Christian proclamation! We have to be very clear about this before we start talking about obedience.

So here goes . . . *there is nothing that you or I or anyone can do that will make God love us more or*

*make God love us less.* We can’t pile up enough good deeds to earn our way into God’s presence nor can we commit enough horrible acts to place ourselves outside God’s redeeming love. God desires that we be in a loving relationship with him and we are put into this right relationship with God through Jesus’ death on the cross, when he took upon himself the sins of us all. All God asks of us is that we trust him, that we place our faith in Jesus Christ and what he did for us. . . Whew! There are many ways

<sup>3</sup> This was the first of at least seven such incidents during Pilate’s procuratorship. Twice during the decade or so, he was called back to Rome to answer for being too tough on the Jews and risking open rebellion.

<sup>4</sup> These are the concluding phrases in Henley’s famous poem “Invictus.”

<sup>5</sup> About 70% of Americans identify themselves as Christian. This is falling about one point every year!

to say what I just said; but that is basically it. It is by God's grace alone<sup>6</sup>, his amazing grace, that we are made right with him.

When the apostle Paul crisscrossed the eastern Mediterranean proclaiming this message of God's grace, the reaction of many went something like this – “Wow! You mean that I'm made right with God by faith, not by what I do . . . alright! I've got faith, now let's go party!”

You may think I'm exaggerating, but I'm not. Some people even suggested to Paul that since grace overcomes sin, then we should sin more so that there can be more grace (Romans 6:1). Obedience does matter. Not because we can earn our way into God's presence. Not because we like the comfort of having some rules to follow. Obedience matters because we desire to be disciples of Jesus Christ and trust that God knows, better than we, the way of life that reflects the kingdom of God.

Like all apprentices, we desire to be like our master and teacher. We desire to be Christ-like. It is God who shows us how. It is God who shows us the way to a joyful life. It is God who shows us the way to a life that can be the light to the world. Obedience is the path to that life.

Look again at the bolded portion of today's passage from Luke. What does Peter do when Jesus tells him to drop the nets? He doesn't hesitate or suggest another plan; he simply obeys. He submits to Jesus. In this, he shows himself ready to undertake the path of discipleship. And what is the result? More fish than he can count! Peter's submission to Jesus' authority and the resulting obedience brought abundance. Not merely piles of fish, but a life lived with Jesus.

#### *The two ways*

In v. 13 & 14 of today's passage from Matthew, Jesus calls upon an old Jewish tradition that contrasts the way of the righteous with the way of the wicked; i.e., those who follow God's instructions with those who do not. Jesus knows that the path of discipleship is not always an easy one. Taking up a cross never is. He knows that the world will be calling his disciples away from their master. We shouldn't read these verses as they too often are – as some ratio of the “saved” (the few) to the “unsaved” (the many). Jesus is not talking about doctrinal correctness, he is talking about obedience, an obedience that flows out of our trust in God. Remember, the entire Sermon on the Mount is like a “training session” for his disciples; it shows them a portrait of life in God's kingdom. Jesus reminds them that without submission and the consequent obedience, his teachings become no more than an impossible ideal, rather than a very real possibility in this life.

#### *Foundations of rock and sand*

After setting out the “two ways” in v. 13 & 14, Jesus then talks about those who will try to pull his disciples off the path of righteousness – those wolves in sheep's clothing. He goes on to remind them that empty words, even words like “Lord, Lord” don't cut it. It is about the doing. We are to understand God's will and do it . . . like Peter in the boat that day, *just do it!*

Finally, in closing, Jesus tells a parable about a wise man and a fool. Jesus and his disciples lived in an arid region that didn't get a lot of rain. There were many large *wadis* (when I lived in Phoenix we called them washes) that would be dry most of the time, but would become dangerous rivers of fast-flowing water when torrential rains came. As compared with some of Jesus' parables, there is nothing unclear or ambiguous about this one. The wise man is the one who hears Jesus' words and “acts on them.” He has built his house in the *wadi* on a foundation of rock. His house stands

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<sup>6</sup> To use a traditional definition, “grace” is “unmerited favor.” If you've earned or deserve it – it isn't grace. The vast majority of Americans think the Bible says: “God helps those who help themselves.” It doesn't. The whole point of grace is that God helps those who can't help themselves – which is all humankind.

when the storms come. The fool is the man who hears Jesus' words and "does not act on them." He has built a house in a *wadi* and placed it on a foundation of sand. Little wonder that the fool is washed away in the first storm!

So our question is straightforward, on what foundation will we build? Will we submit to the Lordship of Jesus? Will we learn his way and strive to love God and neighbor in all things? Will we undertake genuine obedience, learning habits of goodness, even as we put our trust, our faith, in Jesus? This is the way to a life of genuine abundance, a joy-filled life lived in the presence of God. There is no other.

A Curriculum for Christlikeness  
*becoming a faithful and obedient disciple of Jesus*

One of Dallas Willard's enduring will surely be *The Divine Conspiracy*. In his book (which I recommend), Dr. Willard laid out a practical approach to discipleship. Much of his book is devoted to the Sermon on the Mount. Surely, he writes, Jesus wouldn't urge his disciples to hear Jesus' words and act on them unless they could actually do so. In other words, surely the sermon is not an impossible ideal.

Dr. Willard suggests that we ought to have two primary objectives as we strive to be authentic disciples, those who hear and do. First, we must learn "to dearly love and constantly delight in the heavenly Father made real to earth in Jesus . . . certain that there is no 'catch'." Second, we have to remove our automatic responses against the kingdom of God – as in "what do you mean, love my enemies. That's impossible!"

We will find delight in the Lord when we learn to let our minds and hearts dwell upon his love and goodness. Robert is going to preach a sermon series in September on "Finding Joy." We find joy in God. A psalmist wrote: "I keep the Lord always before me . . . In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:8-11).

The irony here is that we do not become authentic and obedient disciples of Jesus Christ by first striving to be obedient! Invariably, humans reduce such an effort to an exercise in rule-keeping. The path of discipleship – the narrow gate, the hard road, the house built on rock – begins with learning to love God and neighbor and discovering that habits of goodness begin to replace habits of selfishness. In this, we are comforted by the knowledge that we are not on our own, but that God's Spirit dwells in each of us, helping us to be whole and complete, to be the very shining and brilliant image of God.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Submission . . . obedience . . . this is a tough subject for many Christians. Begin by making a list of your own thoughts about obedience. What words come to mind? Do you find yourself wanting to start making a list of rules? Many people want to make the Bible into just that . . . but it is not a book of rules or a book of right behavior. Knowing which moral choices God would wish us to make is often not straightforward. Even the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of do's and don'ts. Instead, Jesus points us toward what Dallas Willard calls the "habits of goodness." Jesus is training us in the curriculum of Christlikeness. What do you think Willard means by habits of goodness? What are some examples of such a habit? How do we develop such habits?
2. Some people don't begin making rule lists when they hear the word "obedience," instead they want to talk about whether they must be obedient to be saved. The simple answer is no . . . but the larger truth is that the people of God strive to be obedient. Not because they "have to" but because they wish to! Salvation is both instantaneous and a process – a process of learning to be obedient, to walk in God's way, to develop the mind of Christ. What do you think this process is like? Where can we turn for help? How will you learn to be obedient?

## *Weekly Prayer List*

During the week, jot down the names of people who need your prayers.  
Such prayers bind you to them in the presence of God.

## *Daily Bible Readings*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<b>Monday, Genesis 22</b> What is this shocking story really about? Does Abraham choose the path of obedience?	<b>Tuesday, 1 Kings 17:1-6</b> What path does Elijah choose and what is the result?
<b>Wednesday, Matthew 4:23 – 7:28</b> The entire Sermon on the Mount. Please read it in one sitting.	<b>Thursday, Luke 6:20-49</b> Jesus' "Great Sermon" from Luke; see esp. v. 46-49 on obedience.
<b>Friday, 1 John 2:1-11</b> John writes about obedience to Jesus	<b>Saturday, James 1</b> James, Jesus' half-brother, writes about practical discipleship – love as action and obedience to the word.

