

UNHESITATING OBEDIENCE

"And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." Luke 5:5.

Had one stood beside the Sea of Galilee on the evening before the events recorded here, he would have seen a group of sturdy fishermen push their boats out from the shore as they went to the task by which they earned their livelihood. Had one been permitted to be with them through the hours of that night, doubtless he would have heard them more than once as, with boats pushed close together, they rested and talked of the wonderful religious teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. What new hopes He had brought into their lives! How their whole conception of life had been changed since they had come to know Him! After pushing their boats apart, they went back to their familiar fishing places. When morning had come they were back on the shore preparing for the day's rest.

Due to the presence of the clamorous multitude, Christ walked down to the water's edge and stepped into Simon Peter's boat. He requested Peter to thrust out the boat a little from the shore which he did very readily and without any question. From that strange pulpit, trembling in the water, encircled with the majesty of the hills, with the mighty dome of the heavens above him, the blue waters of beautiful Galilee at His feet and the birds of the air for His choristers, Christ preached to the people. He preached to them in terms which they could understand and illustrated truth by simple incidents taken from their daily lives. Concerning the result of His message to the crowds nothing was recorded.

When Christ had finished His message He turned to Peter and said, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Then came Peter's memorable answer: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." This reply is one of the finest expressions of obedience to Christ that was ever recorded. It was both unhesitating and unquestioning. Peter not only stated how poor fishing had been during the night, but he frankly expressed his willingness to do as Christ had bidden him. Instead of saying that it was useless to try again in the bright sunshine when prospects seemed to be the most unfavorable Peter expressed his willingness to try because Christ had commanded it.

In all probability Peter was surprised at and bewildered by Christ's command, inasmuch as He was not a fisherman. He was a carpenter and had not even lived in a town on the shore of a lake. Having lived in Nazareth, which was several miles from the lake, He could not have been expected to know the right time or conditions for fishing, if He were only a man.

The pivot on which Peter's faith swung was the word "nevertheless." His simple faith was embodied in obedience. We are to believe and obey at His word. "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." This statement is one of the finest expressions of unhesitating obedience to Christ that was ever recorded.

I. Unhesitating Obedience In Spite Of Physical Exhaustion.

Simon Peter's reply, "Master, we have toiled all the night," expresses the feeling of weariness and fatigue. They were not idlers. They were

hard-working fishermen. They had not been fishing for recreation but rather for a living. They were very tired men because they had toiled hard -- dropping their nets and drawing them up again, empty. From sunset to sunrise, they had rowed up and down the lake, casting their heavy nets. They had spent the entire night pulling the oars and lifting the nets as the task by which they earned a livelihood for themselves and their families. Their tired and aching muscles registered their protest against any further activity. Having toiled all the night, it was time for them to seek food and rest. Therefore, it seemed hard to ask these weary men to resume their toil when they so sorely needed breakfast and a bed. In spite of physical exhaustion, Peter ignored his own feeling and unhesitatingly obeyed the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." This is a wonderful example of unquestioning obedience at a time of physical exhaustion.

II. Unhesitating Obedience In The Midst Of Doubt.

That was a strange command to those veteran fishermen who knew their business and were experts at it. Anyone who understood anything about fishing knew that if the hours of darkness had not yielded anything, then there was not the remotest chance of a catch when the waters were shimmering in the morning sun. Knowing the science of their craft, they might have objected to the command of Christ by saying, "But, Lord, we have toiled all night, and the night is the customary and proper time to catch fish. The other fishermen will laugh at us if they see us fishing in the daytime."

What a shock this command must have been to Simon, that he, who had been a fisherman all his life, should be told by one who was obviously not a fisherman, what to do in order to catch fish! One can imagine him reasoning along this line, "Master, you are a wonderful religious teacher, but when it comes to fishing, I believe that I know more about it than you do. Since I was a lad, I have fished on this lake and I know that no one ever fishes here in the daytime. Since we have toiled and struggled all night without any success whatever, it's useless to try to catch fish when the glare of the sun is on the water."

Although he doubted the wisdom of doing what Jesus told him to do, Simon Peter yielded to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net," as he promptly obeyed. It did not matter that the advise seemed totally unreasonable, because it was the word of Christ that was final with him.

By his unquestioning obedience he learned that Jesus knew more about fishing than he did. As we obey Christ, we shall learn that He knows more about our homes, our vocations and our business than we do.

III. Unhesitating Obedience In The Face Of Failure.

"Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." These expert fishermen who had been trained at this task from their youth had worked hard at the right thing in the right place and at the right time. Through the dreary and weary hours of the night these dispirited men had labored without success. Casting and drawing the nets without any sign of success tried their nerves and tortured their wills. They were both disappointed and discouraged. Hard work with futility as a climax chills

the ardour and dampens the enthusiasm of the most courageous. There was little wonder that they were downcast.

However, their failure was perfectly honorable and their frank admission had no shame attached to it. It was not the confession of amateurs who had bungled their task, but of experts who had been fishing on that lake since they were lads and who knew all the art of their craft. Whatever the reason for their failure might have been, it was not due to their incompetence.

There is nothing so crushing as failure. It steals the sparkle from the eye, snatches the spring of youth from the step and writes its ugly record into the lines of the face.

Instead of sympathizing with them in their failure, Jesus bade them launch out into the deep -- go out at once and try again. Here is the highest test of obedience. To be willing to go back at His command to the scene of failure and remain there until He calls us away is to reach the table-land of obedience.

At our Lord's bidding, the disciples went back where they had failed, let down their nets and "enclosed a great multitude of fishes." What turned their failure into success? It was simply venturing out and acting on the word of the Lord. The Master had spoken and that was enough. Faith in the Lord and obedience to Him means to stand in the place of victory.

The great multitude of fishes was the reward of their ready and willing obedience. It was the justification of their unshaken confidence in Jesus. He never deceives any who trust and obey Him. It was part of His gracious purpose to teach them that without Him they could do nothing and that with Him they could do all things. It was obedience under trying circumstances and as such it was crowned with success. After all, it is a blessed thing to obey the Lord. If we will go forward in unfaltering confidence in Jesus, we shall receive blessings beyond what we dare dream of today.

The disciples had two qualities which merit our imitation -- unquestioning faith and unhesitating obedience. There is something exceedingly beautiful and touching about the way in which they accepted, believed and obeyed His word and at His mere command proceeded to do a work which both their reflection, observation and experience would have assured them to be useless. With an unwavering faith in Christ we should ascertain His will and then proceed to accomplish it, however unlikely success may appear.

When Simon obeyed the Master, his full confidence and perfect obedience were richly rewarded. Instantly a vast haul of fishes crowded into the nets and both his boat and those of his partners were filled to overflowing with the spoil of the sea. They had never seen such a haul before and coming so soon after one of their greatest failures, their astonishment was complete. Obedience to Christ never comes in empty-handed.

It is worth our while to note the great things that Simon Peter and his associates found on the pathway of obedience that morning. I am not thinking just of the great number of fishes that filled the boat and taxed the strength of the nets to breaking. I am thinking of the two-

fold vision represented in the cry of Peter, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." A new vision of himself -- of his littleness and unworthiness. There is no place for pride or self-sufficiency as we travel the pathway of obedience. Then there was a new vision of Christ. Jesus loomed larger and more wondrous than ever before. As we follow in simple obedience He always looms larger and larger until we marvel that He can remain with us as we blunder and falter and question. When they came to land, they left all things and followed Him. Ever after He was to hold the central place in their thoughts and affections. Ours should be lives of unhesitating obedience in spite of physical exhaustion, in the midst of doubt and in the face of failure.