

## **From Surviving to Thriving** **Luke 4:42-5:16**

One of the most popular reality TV shows of all time is Survivor. The basic idea is that a group of castaways are dropped off on a deserted island somewhere and they have to survive the elements, various competitive challenges, and getting voted off by other contestants. The ultimate goal is to be the last person standing at the end after all the stress and struggles and votes. Many are familiar with it.

They're just trying to survive, and I don't know about you, but there are times when it feels like I'm just trying to survive as well. There's always so much to do, so many expectations, needs, demands... Even though I come up with plans for how to get everything done, challenges come up, problems, unexpected circumstances. Things break or don't go the way they're supposed to and it feels like as soon as I get one thing done there's always something more.

Busyness seems to be common in our culture and it's easy to get caught in the flow and end up just trying to survive a lot of the time. And it's in this context that we're called to be followers of Christ and make him and his kingdom our highest priority. Jesus doesn't want our pursuit of him to be just some added thing on top of everything else, he wants it to be central. How is that supposed to happen if we're doing all we can to just try to survive?

This morning I want us to see what Jesus' secret was for thriving in the midst of an intense and busy schedule. Jesus was very busy, but he was able to flourish in living a God-centered life. I want us to learn a very important lesson from him so we too can thrive instead of just trying to survive.

Jesus began doing ministry in Capernaum after being rejected in his hometown of Nazareth and we saw last week that he had an incredible first day – the people he ministered to were amazed because he had authority in his preaching, power to cast out demons, and power to heal the sick. Word spread quickly and in a matter of hours he was inundated with people who needed him. Mark 1:28 says, *“And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.”*

That's where we left off last week – a busy day of ministry that went long into the night. I want us to pay attention to what he did next and what happened after.

Read Luke 4:42-44.

*And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them,<sup>43</sup> but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."<sup>44</sup> And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*

Luke says that after a long night of ministry he departed and went into a desolate place. Mark 1:35 adds a few more details: *"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."*

So after a busy night healing sick and casting out demons, Jesus got up early, went out to the countryside to be alone with his Father, and prayed. He didn't get up early to get some more stuff done before people started showing up again. He got up early to spend time alone with his Father. I want us to note that, and I also want us to note what he did next.

After having such a powerful and positive impact on the people of Capernaum, it would make most sense to stay there and build on that. Capernaum was an important city, situated right on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, he could have made that a central hub of ministry and established some kind of church or ministry center. People were already looking for him that morning and wanted him to stay. He was in high demand. Most preachers would stay right there.

But Jesus did something you really wouldn't expect. He actually left Capernaum to go to the smaller towns and villages to preach to them. The reason he gave was, *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."* I can tell you from being in ministry that it would be really easy to assume that after God worked in such a powerful way the day before it would be his will to stay and keep up that good work. I even thought of the Bible study "Experiencing God" that many of us have gone through and some are going through right now. The main point of that study is to find out where God is at work and join him there. God was clearly at work in Capernaum, why didn't Jesus stay there?

The way this is written leads me to believe that Jesus didn't stay because early in the morning when he went to pray, his heavenly Father told him he wanted him to move on. I can imagine Jesus' prayer: "Father, you moved in a powerful way in this city last night, should I stay here and continue to do your work?" And the Father spoke to him and said, "No. My will is that you go to the towns and villages and preach there. For this is what I sent you to do."

Jesus was really busy doing ministry and in high demand, but he took the time to meet with his heavenly Father and he came out of that time knowing his Father's will and focused on what he was called to do. Very significant.

Now Luke goes on to write that soon after that Jesus did a miracle that resulted in Peter catching an enormous number of fish because of what Jesus told him to do, even though he had fished all night and hadn't caught any. Peter was deeply moved and gave up fishing at that point to follow Jesus full time. A great story, but what I want to look at is what Luke writes after that.

Read Luke 5:12-16.

*<sup>12</sup> While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." <sup>13</sup> And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." <sup>15</sup> But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. <sup>16</sup> But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*

So after healing the leper Jesus' fame spread even more and he was in such high demand that Mark says he could no longer enter a town openly but had to stay outside. So many people wanted to be near him and healed of their diseases that the towns couldn't handle it. Jesus was extremely busy. He had huge expectations and heavy demands. He was helping hundreds and hundreds of people. And his busyness wasn't a bad thing – he wasn't a workaholic, he was in the center of God's will.

But despite having that kind of busy lifestyle, Luke points out that Jesus withdrew to desolate places to pray. So it wasn't just a one-time thing after a busy day back in Capernaum, it was a pattern in Jesus' life. Jesus made it a point to get away

regularly to be alone with his Father and pray. It was valuable to him and he made it a priority. Why?

I believe it was to abide with his Father so he could find nourishment for his soul and be united with his Father's will. How did Jesus keep in step with the Father's will and have the motivation and strength to deal with all the demands and expectations of ministry? How did he know what he was supposed to do – where to go and not to go, what to do and what not to do? How did he stay focused and in the center of God's will? I believe it came from the times spent in prayer in those desolate places. It was in those times that he communed with his Father and when he came out of them his spirit was full and nourished and in tune with God's will. It kept him focused and connected.

We see evidence of this in the way that Jesus spoke about his relationship with his heavenly Father. John records several of those comments:

- John 5:19-20: *“So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.”*
- John 12:49-50: *“For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. <sup>50</sup> And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”*
- John 14:8-11: *“Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”*

I believe this describes what happened when Jesus went to desolate places to pray. Jesus was one with his Father. In one sense, this was kind of automatic by virtue of the eternal union he had with God the Father within the mystery of the Trinity. But when Jesus emptied himself and took on human flesh, in his human nature he had a dependence on his Father for all things as we heard in what we

just read. So I believe Jesus went to desolate places to pray because of his dependence on his Father – he went to commune with the Father, to be nourished in his spirit, to receive all that he needed to do what he was called to do, and to experience oneness with the Father while he walked this earth.

Jesus' secret for thriving in the midst of an intense and busy schedule was to withdraw to desolate places to pray. It was a priority and pattern in his life.

And if that was true for him, would it not also be true for us? Jesus told his disciples that very thing in John 15:4-5: *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

If you find yourself in the position of just trying to survive in the midst of all the things going on in our busy lives, I believe Jesus is inviting you to abide in him. Branches can only thrive if they are abiding in the vine. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30 *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

How do we abide in Jesus? We need to make it our priority to go to those desolate places to pray and meet with him. Meditate on Scripture and listen for his voice. Find a time and place where you can get away for some time with Jesus on a regular basis. Maybe there's a room in your house you can go to. Maybe it's outside when the weather is nice. Maybe there's a park or a coffee shop. Bring your Bible and a notebook. Turn off your phone. Spend time with just you and Jesus.

In those times you will find nourishment for your soul. You will remember the things that are truly important. You will be realigned with God's will. You will come to know and love Jesus in a deepening relationship with him. It's not a task to check off your list for the day, it's a lifeline in order to thrive.