

THE NEED FOR A GROWING FAITH

Luke 17:1-5

Intro: Everyone who knows the Lord should understand that the faith by which we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, is a gift from God. Ephesians 2:8-9 make it clear that everything about salvation is a gift from God. And the fact that our trust in God does not originate with us, is clear also from Hebrews 12:2 where we read, “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.” As the Author of our faith, the Lord is the Originator; as the Finisher, He is the One Who perfects our faith. And it is usually through the trials and testings of our lives that, in a sense, we are forced to look away from that which troubles us, to the Lord Who is not only our Example by what He did in His suffering, but Who imparts faith to us so that we trust God rather than to despair.

So the contemplation of Christ, when we turn from our troubles to think of Him and to learn from Him, we find that He strengthens our faith. And this is not what we are to do just when we are faced with troubles of some kind, but this is to be a daily habit with us. “Looking” is a present participle, indicating what we are to do continuously, deliberately looking away from everything else, to focus our undivided attention upon our Lord. Since we cannot see the Lord physically in person, we do this by meditating upon the Lord as we find Him revealed on the pages of Scripture. This, of course, is only that which believers can do.

But there is another passage of Scripture which helps us in the development and strengthening of our faith, and that is Romans 10:17. In that verse we are told, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Some MSS read, “the Word of Christ.” And the Greek word for “word” in this passage is *ἄκοή*, which refers to the spoken word of God, or of Christ. This does not mean that we have to have personally heard the Lord speak, but it is identifying Scripture as the very Word of God.

So hear again we learn about how faith comes to us. It comes through the Word of God. When an unsaved person is hearing the Gospel, and the Scriptures are being used, it is through that Word that God ministers faith to the one who is hearing the truth. Faith comes to us, and it can only come from us, that is, be exercised by us, after it has come to us. That is true when we are first saved, and it continues to be true throughout our lives as Christians. We are to live by faith, faith in God, faith in Christ, faith in the Word of God.

This is always difficult for us to learn. Before we came to Christ to be saved, we were used to trusting in ourselves, or trusting in other people. But once we are saved, we are to trust in ourselves no longer, but to trust in God, to trust in Christ, to trust in the Holy Spirit. And we are continually failing to do this.

Now I want us to look at a passage of Scripture tonight in which we can see that the disciples recognized that their faith had to come from God, or in this particular case, from the Lord Jesus Christ. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 17:1, and I will read the first five verses.

I. THE SETTING OF THESE VERSES.

The Lord was speaking to His disciples, so this tells us that this is a lesson for those of us who claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior. And the Lord was talking about “offences.” These are ways in which we offend others, or others offend us. Sometimes these can be major offences; at other times they may not be so great. But the Lord gives an example of a great offence when He spoke in verse 2 about offending little children. This would mean standing in a child’s way to keep him or her from hearing the Gospel, and from coming to Christ.

Now the Lord says that it is impossible for any of us to avoid these offences. We may offend others, or others may offend us. We live in a corrupt world where people have no time for God, where they are intent on living the way they want to live, and in doing what they want to do. But if you read this passage carefully, you will see that in the first two verses the Lord was speaking about ways in which we might offend others, but in verses 3 and 4 He was speaking about those times when others may offend us.

Now it seems that in the first two verses the Lord had in mind those who stand in the way of somebody else’s salvation, and particularly the salvation of children. Parents who stand in the way of the salvation of their children, or anyone who keeps children from coming to the Lord, is committing an offence toward God for which they will pay a great price. There is a great deal of talk these days about children, about their abuse, or about what they are learning in our schools, but we hardly ever hear people talking about a child’s relationship to the Lord.. And whether a person deliberately keeps a child from hearing about God, or just doesn’t have the time to make sure that a child hears about the Lord, both are equally an offence to God for which a person will be made to pay a terrible, terrible

price. It is better for a person to have a millstone tied around his neck, and be cast into the sea, than for him in any way to become a barrier keeping a child from hearing the Gospel. Whether a person is a Christian or not, their children are an heritage from the Lord, and having children carried with it a great responsibility, an unavoidable responsibility, to make sure that that child learns about the Lord.

This was a truth that even the disciples had to learn. Cf. Matt. 19:13-15:

13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

Saul of Tarsus learned much about God in his growing up years, but he did not learn about Christ and salvation. How different it was with Timothy! When the Apostle Paul wrote his last epistle, which was his second epistle to Timothy, you probably remember that he said this:

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

One thing I think most of us noticed at Camp this year, was that there were lots of children there. We have many children in our church family. I have said more than once, and I really believe this, that probably the most important work that is being done here at Trinity, is our ministry to our children, and our young people. Let's not ignore them. Let's get acquainted with them, and talk to them, and encourage them. The Lord always took time with children, and so should we!

But let us move on to the second part of this passage:

II. WHEN OTHERS OFFEND US (Luke 17:4-5).

The Lord began this part with the word, "Take heed unto yourselves." Now we all need to be careful, very careful, that we do not put a stumbling block in someone else's way. The Apostle Paul said as much in his letter to the church at Rome. I am thinking of Rom. 14:13 where he said,

Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this

rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way (Rom. 14:13).

Here in this verse the Apostle Paul was talking about our relationship with each other as believers. And I think that the Lord Jesus was doing the same in our text in Luke 17. But when the Lord said, "Take heed unto yourselves," I don't think that he was warning His disciples there about ways in which they might offend others, but he was warning them about what their reaction might be when others offend them! That is what he went on to talk about.

The offences that come up between us are a hindrance to our fellowship. We can't keep others from offending us, but we are responsible to God for the way we react to those who offend us.

Now clearly the offending brother was in the wrong. The disciples would be involved in a situation for which they were not responsible. They had done no wrong, but a brother had committed a trespass against them. What did the Lord mean when He used this word, "trespass"? It is a Greek word for *sin*. This means that he has done something that is wrong in God's sight. Perhaps he has been gossiping about you, and circulating rumors which are not true. In other words, he has been lying about you. It could be any number of things. Maybe he owes you some money, and promises that he is going to pay you, but he never does.

The Lord says that you can rebuke him, and if he repents, you are to forgive him.

But what if you go through the same thing with that same person seven times a day, what do you do then? Now the Lord obviously chose an extreme case because I have never known a case like this – seven times a day a man repents, but between each repentance he continues doing the same thing that you have forgiven him for doing. He repents; you forgive him. He repents again; and you forgive him again. And you go through this seven times in one day, and each time you are to forgive him.

Now I have explained to you that faith comes by hearing the Word, and faith comes from our Lord Jesus Christ.

There was another situation where this same subject of forgiveness came up, and the Apostle Peter asked the Lord a question. The passage is found in Matt 18:21-22. Here is Peter's question, and the Lord's answer:

21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my

brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

What is your reaction to these words from the Lord? You probably are inclined to think, “Well, that might be the Lord’s will, but obviously it does not work.” And we might go on to say, “There has to be some other solution.”

But wait a minute! Are we saying that this was one point in the Lord’s teaching where He was wrong? That can’t be! The Lord was incapable of teaching error. Let’s go back and look at the whole situation again. What was the Lord’s purpose in all of this? Was it to correct the offender? Not primarily. His purpose was that His disciples would always cultivate the habit of forgiving those who offend us, even though the problem may go on over and over again. We need to do what Solomon exhorted his son to do year and years ago: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

And let us ask ourselves this question: “How often has it been that we have been the offender, and the Lord has been the offended one?” And how many times have we gone to the Lord confessing the same sin over and over again? And when has it been that we have gone to the Lord to confess that same sin, and He has told us, “You don’t need to come to me again about this same sin, because you have used up your opportunities to be forgiven.” Does the Lord say that? I am not encouraging sin, but we all need to be amazed as God’s forgiveness which He has extended to us time and time again. It may be that in some cases it has been more than seven times seventy. But 1 John 1:9 still stands written in the Word:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You see, how the Lord may see fit to use our forgiveness of others, is in His hands. What He wants us to have is a forgiving spirit, even when it might seem that others are making a fool out of us. We must no question the wisdom of any part of the Word of God. Let us set our hearts on pleasing God, and trust Him to work out the solution to the problem.

So when anyone does something wrong to us, we are to do what the Word says, and leave the outcome in the hands of the Lord. But there is one more point in this passage that is very, very important, and I can’t leave it out. Let me call it:

III. THE APOSTLES' PRAYER (Luke 17:5).

What was it? You can read it there in verse 5: "Lord, increase our faith."

All obedience requires faith. We accept God's Word as right, and we look to Him to give us the faith we need to do what He says even when it does not seem right, or even the best, to us. I think I am right when I say that this is the only time this prayer was prayed by the apostles, at least the only time it is on record in the Gospels. But, oh, how important it is for all of us to pray this prayer. We are to obey the Lord trusting Him to work out the consequences.

Bishop Ryle made this comment on the Apostle's Prayer in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke:

Faith is a grace which admits of degrees. It does not come to full strength and perfection as soon as it is planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. There is "little" faith and "great" faith; there is "weak" faith and "strong" faith: both are spoken of in the Scriptures; both are to be seen in the experience of God's people. The more faith a Christian has, the more happy, holy, and useful will he be. To promote the growth and progress of faith should be the daily prayer and endeavour of all who love life. When the Apostles said, "Increase our faith," they did well (II, pp. 226, 227).

Concl: So let us remember, when someone sins against us, it is not only a problem for them, but in our relationship with the Lord, it is also a problem for us. The important thing for us is that we please the Lord by our response, and to do His will by faith means that we will do it from the heart, trusting the Lord to work out the whole situation for His glory. The Word is always right, and when we obey the Word, that is when our faith becomes stronger, and when God get the glory that He so richly deserves.

So may our daily prayer be, "Lord, increase our faith."